

Friday, March 23, 1990

Amendment increases budget by \$511 M House debates education finance bill

AUSTIN (AP) — Public schools would get an estimated \$511 million more in 1990-91 under an education finance reform bill amended Thursday by the Texas House.

By late afternoon, lawmakers had considered about 30 amendments, but Rep. Ernestine Glossbrenner, D-Alice, had fought off most major changes to her measure.

Legislators planned to offer dozens more amendments to the bill. Speaker Gib Lewis, D-Fort Worth, said he expected the House to work into the night to pass school finance reform legislation.

Legislative leaders said the House bill would end up in a conference committee to work out differences with a \$1.2 billion Senate measure before the special session expires at midnight Wednesday.

The cost of Glossbrenner's bill was increased from \$450 million through amendments adding \$45 million to make up for underestimated student enrollment this school year, and \$16 million for drug and alcohol intervention.

An amendment requiring the state to pay for its education mandates, with some exceptions, also was approved.

But lawmakers rejected a proposal to whittle the bill's cost to \$260 million, and another to increase it to \$950 million next school year.

The proposed \$260 million amendment, which included recommendations by Gov. Bill

Clements' education task force and was in his price range, was tabled 85-61, with the bulk of its support coming from Republicans.

"Everyone of us cares about education in this state," said Rep. Alan Schoolcraft, R-Universal City, who offered the amendment. "What we're talking about is not just money. We're talking about, 'What is it we want for the future?'"

The amendment would allow the Legislature to avoid raising state taxes, Schoolcraft said.

But Glossbrenner urged lawmakers to support her bill, which would phase in changes over five years, to make the school financing equitable.

"We need to face up to the fact that education is going to be expensive," she said.

Glossbrenner also spoke against an amendment by Rep. Gregory Luna, D-San Antonio, that would have added \$500 million to the bill's cost, saying she did not know how the state would raise that much money.

Luna said that should not be the criteria: "Vote for what is needed. Then we'll consider where the money is going to come from." His amendment was tabled 110-37.

Lawmakers are working to address a Texas Supreme Court ruling that the school finance system is unconstitutional because of disparities between property-rich and -poor school districts. The \$13.5 billion-a-year public school system relies on a combination of state aid, local property taxes and federal funds.

Clements has promised to veto any bill above the no-new-taxes level, which he has estimated at \$200 million to \$300 million for 1990-91.

Most of the additional funding in Glossbrenner's bill would be poured into the guaranteed yield program, in which schools are assured a certain amount of money, through state and local funds combined, if they impose property taxes at a certain level.

The basic allotment per student, currently \$1,477, would be \$1,500 next school year under the bill, the same as provided under current law.

The measure also includes provisions designed to improve education. Among them:

- The school year would be lengthened from 175 to 180 days.
- Power to make education policy would be transferred from the State Board of Education to the education commissioner. The commissioner, currently appointed by the education board, would be named by the governor, with Senate consent, from candidates recommended by legislative leaders.
- School boards would be required to make public an annual report for each campus.
- Schools that demonstrate they are doing a good job of educating students would be freed of a number of state regulations.
- Funds would be created for technology and tuition assistance.

Geography students return from vacation with water samples

By SELINA GONZALEZ
Of The Battalion Staff

While some Texas A&M students returned from spring break with a tan or a hangover, students in some physical geography labs brought water samples from their vacation spots.

Greg Schlenker, graduate teaching assistant in the geography department, said the students tested the quality of different water samples including samples from the A&M campus and Bryan and College Station.

Although it appears the quality of campus water is poorer than that of Bryan-College Station, Schlenker said the area water quality in general rates average compared to areas tested by the students.

The water properties evaluated were copper, iron, pH level, sulfates, sodium chloride, total dissolved solids, nitrates and total chlorine.

"There may be other chemicals or elements in the water system that we aren't detecting because we aren't looking for them," he said.

Some of the water samples were from such areas as Central America, California, Utah, Florida and all across Texas, Schlenker said.

The test results showed the sodium chloride content in campus water to be slightly higher than in water of Bryan and College Station, Schlenker said. Total dissolved solids and copper were comparable to Bryan-College Station water, while total chlorine was slightly lower on campus than in the community.

The chlorine level of the Bryan-College Station water level rates in the middle of the range of areas tested.

"Austin uses a lot more chlorine because they have a lot of sulfates and higher incidences of bacteria in their water supply," he said. "Chlorine has a strong impact on the water's taste."

Although chlorine is used to get rid of bacteria of living organisms in the water supply, Schlenker said, it has a negative effect on humans over the long term and in high doses.

Schlenker said improving the water quality can be expensive.

"Studies of the sink-top carbon filtration water treatment system indicated higher quantities of sodium chloride and the chloride salts than untreated water, but we had almost complete removal of chlorine," Schlenker said.

The water tasted better because it was conditioned or softened.

"The best quality water indicated by our ranking was the vending machine water from in front of the supermarket," he said.

The reverse osmosis method, which is expensive and popular, is used to purify this water.

"In this process, the water is filtered through some kind of membrane which takes it down to approximately the size of a water molecule removing all the impurities," Schlenker said.

There is a remarkable improvement when comparing untreated College Station water to reverse osmosis College Station water, he said.

'Texas Chain Store Massacre' Japanese company buys 7-Eleven chain

DALLAS (AP) — The founder of 7-Eleven, a pioneer of convenience shopping and one of the best-known store chains, said Thursday it's selling control to a Japanese company because of crushing debts from a junk bond-financed buyout.

The announcement by Southland Corp., which owns 7,000 7-Elevens in the United States, is one of the most dramatic examples yet of the problems facing U.S. companies that participated in the junk-bond craze of the 1980s.

Southland said it agreed to sell 75 percent of its common stock for \$400 million to Ito-Yokado Co. Ltd., Japan's second-largest supermarket operator, and longtime Southland affiliate 7-Eleven Japan, which Ito-Yokado controls.

Besides the company-owned 7-Elevens, the deal includes Southland's six food processing centers and five distribution centers.

Southland, which sought the Japanese buyer, said the deal hinges on the company's ability to get 32 bank

creditors to restructure terms of its outstanding preferred stock and \$1.8 billion in debt. Much of the debt is in high-interest junk bonds used to finance the \$4.9 billion leveraged buyout by its founding Thompson family in 1987.

Almost immediately after the buyout, dubbed by Wall Street as the "Texas Chain Store Massacre," the company had problems meeting huge debt payments. It attempted to raise cash partly by selling such assets as a half-interest in Citgo Petro-

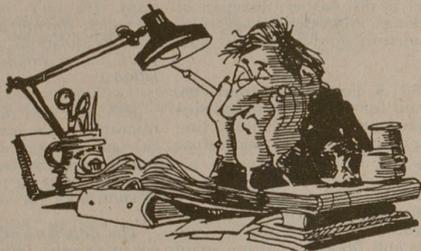
leum Corp., a major refiner.

7-Eleven is the world's largest convenience store chain, offering items ranging from milk and frozen foods to newspapers, hot coffee, video rentals and "Slurpee" slushed ice drinks.

"We believe this transaction is necessary to preserve the business we've built..." said John P. Thompson, Southland's chairman.

Thompson's family will retain a 15 percent stake in the company and positions on the board of directors.

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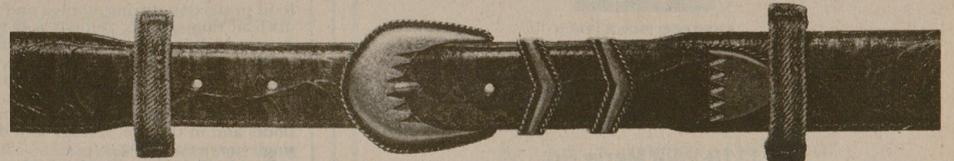


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