

Senators approve legislation to end tax breaks for businesses

AUSTIN (AP) — Saying tax breaks for businesses cost school districts millions of dollars, Texas senators voted Monday to put an end to the practice.

"It is not right for a business to demand an educated workforce, yet also demand tax breaks that create a hardship on the local school district," said Sen. David Sibley, R-Waco.

His bill would prevent school districts from giving new property tax exemptions or taking part in new tax

increment financing plans after Sept. 1.

Under a tax increment financing plan, which can be initiated by a city, a portion of taxes paid by a property owner is put into a fund used for improvements benefiting the property. For example, property taxes may be used to pay for a mall parking lot.

School districts would be able to honor agreements approved before Sept. 1, but they could not increase their level of financial participation in the deals after

the law takes effect. The bill, which was approved on a non-record vote, goes to the House for consideration.

Sen. Jeff Wentworth disagreed with Sibley on the need for the bill, saying economic development decisions should be left at the local level.

"I've had calls from local school boards that say... it's good for us, and we don't want to be deprived of this tool," said Wentworth, R-San Antonio.

School board and administrator groups, however,


have said they face pressure to grant the tax breaks.

"For years, the industries have been playing one against another," said Sen. Gregory Luna, D-San Antonio.

In 1995, 160 school districts forfeited \$143 million in tax revenue after abatement agreements totaling \$9.9 billion in property from local tax rolls. A total of \$480 million in local property tax revenue was lost between 1985 and 1995 due to tax abatements, according to state figures.

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