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Commission to examine Texas higher education

DALLAS (AP) — Texas boasts 140 public and private colleges and universities, but only one in five Texans holds a bachelor's or graduate degree.

Lt. Gov. Rick Perry hopes to improve those numbers through the Special Commission on 21st Century Colleges and Universities.

Perry yesterday announced formation of the 15-member panel, which will examine workforce needs and demographic changes and search for ways to prepare colleges and universities.

"I don't think there's been the type of focus on higher education that it deserves," Perry said during a news conference at El Centro College in downtown Dallas. "We have a good system. We have great universities. It can be better."

The group, composed of Texas Railroad Commissioner Tony Garza, four state senators and 10

private citizens, will hold hearings throughout the state starting next month and issue a report to the Legislature by Nov. 1, 2000.

"We have a good system. We have great universities. It can be better."

— Rick Perry
Texas lieutenant governor

In the past 30 years, only two studies of higher education have taken place in Texas, Perry said. During the last study, in 1987, the timing was bad because the state's economy was weak, he said.

"I think we have a window of

opportunity in this state," Perry said. "I don't know when the window closes. I don't want to squander that."

Task force member Sen. West called the commission's goals "visionary."

"I can think of no greater goal for the state of Texas than to improve its institutions of higher learning," West, D-Dallas, said. On the panel are Carlos Torres, Corpus Christi; Senate Education Commission Chair Teel L. Williams, Amarillo; and Senate Education Commission Chair Bill Ratliff, Mount Pleasant.

During the 76th Legislature session, which ended in May, lawmakers created a \$100 million scholarship program to help Texas attend college.

They also set aside \$1 billion for higher education over the next two years.

Bush defends service record

AUSTIN (AP) — The former speaker of the Texas House of Representatives said yesterday that he called the head of the Texas Air National Guard in 1968 to recommend Republican presidential front runner George W. Bush for a pilot slot during the Vietnam War.

But Ben Barnes, who later was lieutenant governor, said the request for his help came from a Bush family friend — not Bush or his father, who then was a congressman.

The Texas governor, meanwhile, insisted again that neither he nor his father sought such assistance when he joined the Guard.

"I can tell you what happened — nothing happened," Bush said at a campaign appearance south of Houston. "My Guard unit was looking for pilots, and I flew for the Guard."

"I'm proud of my service, and any allegation that my dad asked for special favors is simply not true. I didn't ask anybody to help get me to the Guard, either."

Barnes has been at the center of questions about Bush's Vietnam-era service for several weeks.

His name surfaced in a lawsuit filed in federal court

in Dallas by the former executive director of the Lottery. Lawrence Littwin has sued GTECH, a lottery operator, alleging that the company is suing him for his firing in 1997, after four months on the job.

"I'm proud of my service, and any allegation that my dad asked for special favors is simply not true."

— TEXAS GOV. GEORGE W. BUSH

According to court records, Littwin's lawyers wanted to question Barnes, who used to lobby for GTECH about whether GTECH was allowed to keep its lucrative state contract in exchange for Barnes' silence about the Guard matter.

That theory has been dismissed as unwarranted. GTECH, Barnes and Bush.

Mark Your Calendar Now for the October 7 Academic Convocation



All members of the Texas A&M family—students, faculty, staff and friends of the University—are encouraged to attend this special celebration of academic excellence at 3 p.m., Thursday, October 7, in Rudder Theater, with a reception immediately following in Rudder Exhibit Hall.

This year's convocation is dedicated to honoring faculty members who have received recognition through the university.

A special address will be delivered by Peter Magrath, president of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges.

October

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8:00 p.m.**

Rudder Auditorium

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