

From the office of
Texas State Representative - Dan Flynn

THE FLYNN REPORT

Legislative Newsletter

April 4, 2003

Greetings Constituents, Supporters and Friends:

This week continued to see many hours dedicated to furthering the cause of Texas public education. The House Public Education Committee heard testimony on a wide range of bills regarding student and teacher performance issues. In the ongoing effort to bring in some of the best minds in educational policy, the committee heard from former Secretary of Education Bill Bennett on Tuesday, March 31 and he gave great insight into issues to be considered.

The Committee did pass a bill this week that would create "freedom scholarships" for economically disadvantaged Texas children trapped in failing schools. Under this bill a pilot program, would allow funds to be allocated to low-income parents in certain school districts to transfer their children to a school of their choice. The bill sponsor believes it would empower parents to make educational decisions on behalf of their child. I have not signed on to this bill and I am not sure if the votes are there for passage.

A bill that requires public school districts to begin each school day with a pledge to the U.S. Flag, a pledge to the Texas Flag, and a "moment of silence" to be used for prayer or meditation. This bill passed out of committee and is headed to the House floor for a vote. There is also a bill that insures that an educator in a Texas school may read from or display historical documents from American history, such as the Declaration of Independence, the Mayflower Compact, The U.S. Constitution, the U.S. Motto, etc.

In 1995 when SB1 was passed, the State Board of Education lost a great deal of its power to protect textbook selection. Because of an Attorney General ruling and Texas Education Agency's doctrines, nobody was viewed as having the authority to reject textbooks offered by publishers, no matter how offensive and unsuitable the content. It was no surprise to many that numerous textbooks subsequently offered by the publishers seemed to be indoctrination pieces and not genuine texts. I have co-sponsored a bill with Rep. Charlie Howard, Houston to give back to the SBOE the authority to protect Texas textbooks. This bill will also be heading to the House floor for a vote within the near future.

The House and the Senate Committees have voted out the Defense of Marriage Act. This bill will protect Texas from re-defining marriage according to what other states do in their courts and legislative bodies. I believe the bill will come to the floor for a vote

within the next few weeks. We can expect this bill to move right along to passage and the Governor's signature.

Liberals in the Texas House were up in arms this week over a resolution praising President Bush's leadership in the war against Iraq and terrorism. State Rep. Lon Burnam, Fort Worth, organized an anti-war rally on the steps of the Capitol that moved into the House Gallery and featured a protestor wearing a homemade Superman costume playing a guitar and singing peace songs. Unfortunately, they didn't remain peaceful for very long. As the House considered the non-binding resolution supporting the President and our troops overseas, the protestors rose to express their angry opposition. Burnam, said, "We are being asked to endorse a course of action I believe is illegal. You members should know the illegality of this war." As the debate continued protestors from Burnam's morning rally began shouting, "Stop the war!" and attempted to unfurl an anti-war banner. Department of Public Safety officers arrested the individuals and escorted them out of the gallery.

Houston Rep. Richard Noriega appeared to side with Burnam when he said that it would somehow be "unprofessional" for him, as an officer in the Texas National Guard charged with supporting the Commander-in-Chief, to vote on a measure supporting the Commander-in-Chief.

Meanwhile, countless legislators left their desks to stand beside the resolution's author, Rep. Rob Eissler, The Woodlands. Eissler, a veteran Navy aviator said, "This resolution supports our Commander-in-Chief as well as the troops under his direction and his actions to protect our citizens and our freedom."

"I think now is the time to rally around our troops, keep their morale high and not embarrass them by what's happening in this House," said Rep. Leo Berman, Tyler, a Vietnam veteran.

Governor Perry was on the House floor expressing support to co-authors of the resolution and hugging the author upon passage. After all the commotion, only three members refused to vote for the measure supporting the Commander-in-Chief during wartime with 6 showing present not voting.

The House Committee on State Health Care Expenditures passed bills that could save \$114 million over the next two years. One establishes a preferred drug list for Medicaid that balances clinical effectiveness and cost of drugs. With prescription drug costs arguably the biggest driver of health care costs in America, many of the very expensive drugs prescribed by Medicaid doctors have cheaper substitutes that are comparable in quality and effectiveness. This bill would require the use of those drugs unless a doctor determines that another drug is necessary for the health of the patient.

A ban on human cloning by Rep. Phil King, Weatherford, passed committee **and will be** headed for Calendars and onto the House floor.

Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn released a second E-Texas report to help legislators find savings in order to balance the budget. Among her latest 42 money-saving recommendations are proposals to allow video lottery terminals in Texas racetracks, reduce administrative costs in school districts, and eliminate state-paid health insurance for appointed members of state boards and commissions. In all, Comptroller Strayhorn has made recommendations that would generate \$5.7 billion for the state without new taxes.

My staff and I welcome your input and your questions. You can reach us in our office located in the Capitol extension: **E1.324**. Mailing address: **P. O. Box 2910, Austin, TX 78768** and our phone number is **512/463-0880**. Email **dan.flynn@house.state.tx.us**.