

Capitol Roundup

News around the Capitol

Compiled from staff and wire reports
Monday, April 11, 2005

EDUCATION

More exercises for schoolkids

A Senate panel on Tuesday will hear a bill that would require middle- and junior high school students to exercise at school daily and would require districts to report health and physical activity statistics to the state.

The Texas Education Agency would then have to share that information with the public, among other requirements.

Senate Bill 42, filed by Sen. Jane Nelson, R-Lewisville, builds on legislation she got passed in 2001 authorizing the State Board of Education to adopt rules requiring elementary school children to exercise every day.

The board ultimately required elementary school students to exercise 135 minutes a week.

The intent of the bill is to help curb obesity, a growing epidemic in Texas.

TAXES

Panel: Tax system is broken

A group of policy experts speaking on a legislative panel Friday in New Braunfels called Texas' tax structure broken, obsolete and in need of change.

The system is "flawed, outdated, antiquated, and it's full of loopholes and can't go on," said Republican Rep. Jim Keffer, R-Eastland, who filed the tax legislation approved by the House last month.

One of the challenges in drafting the legislation was the desire of lawmakers to reduce property taxes while instituting a new business tax that would offset property tax losses but wouldn't deter potential employers from moving to Texas.

Byron Schlomach, chief economist for the conservative Texas Public Policy Foundation, said that property tax relief is necessary but that the proposed one-third cut in property taxes is too much without revenue to replace it.

Debate on the tax bill has moved to the Senate, where lawmakers have sharply different ideas about which taxes are needed to replace property taxes.

STATE PENSIONS

Ban on Sudan investments

A bill that would prohibit state pension funds from investing in companies that do business in Sudan was voted out of a House committee last week.

The House Committee on Pensions and Investments approved House Bill 815, sponsored Rep. Lon Burnam, D-Fort Worth. Republican Railroad Commissioner Michael Williams spoke in favor of the bill before the committee.

The bill has not yet been scheduled for a vote on the House floor.

According to Burnam's office, the Center for Security Policy estimates that the Teacher Retirement System of Texas and the Employees' Retirement System hold investments in 61 companies doing business in Sudan.

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TODAY'S SCHEDULE

The House will convene at 10 a.m.

The Senate will convene at 1:30 p.m.

The House State Affairs Committee will meet at 8 a.m. in Room E2.010.

The House Higher Education Committee will meet at 8 a.m. in Room JHR 120.

The Senate Finance Committee will meet at 9 a.m in Room E1.036.

The House Natural Resources Committee will meet at 2 p.m in Room E2.014.

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