

Posted on Fri, Apr. 20, 2007

LEGISLATIVE BRIEFING

Bye-bye, TAKS?

AUSTIN

-- The state's high-stakes Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills is a step closer to being replaced by end-of-course exams.

On Thursday, the Senate unanimously approved a bill that would replace the TAKS with annual tests in four core subjects -- language arts, math, science and social studies -- for students in grades nine to 11. Younger students would still have to take the standardized TAKS.

Teachers and parents have assailed the TAKS as unfair, saying that it takes too much classroom time to prepare students for the exams. High school juniors must pass the exit-level TAKS to graduate.

The new end-of-course tests would be phased in, starting with ninth-graders in the 2009-10 school year. The bill goes to the House for consideration.

"For a long time, we've all heard the public outcry. We've all heard the frustration," said Sen. Florence Shapiro, a Plano Republican who sponsored the bill. "End-of-course assessments will go a long way toward addressing many of these concerns."

Bible bill amended

A bill allowing Bible classes in Texas public high schools was substantially amended and approved by the House Public Education Committee on Thursday.

About 10 amendments were added, according to Kathy Miller, president of the Texas Freedom Network, including measures for teacher training and qualifications, requirements for curriculum standards and use of a textbook (not the Bible itself), protections for the religious freedom of students and families, and language allowing local school officials to decide whether they want to offer such a course.

"These committee members clearly understood that families and churches, not the government, should teach our children what to believe about the Bible," Miller said. "They voted to give the Bible the respect it deserves, and we trust that the full House will show the same care and diligence when it takes up the bill."

Tele-taxes mounting

No, it's not your imagination. A lot of government fees and taxes are included on your phone bill.

According to a report released Thursday by the Texas Public Policy Foundation, Texans pay an average of \$26.51 a month in telecommunications taxes applied to cable, phone and wireless services.

"This combined tax rate of nearly 19 percent ranks Texas among the three highest states in telecommunications tax burden," said Bill Peacock, director of the foundation's Center for Economic Freedom. Texans pay an average tax rate of 22.3 percent on standard phone service, compared with the national average of 17.23 percent, the study found.

Peacock is urging passage of legislation designed to reduce the burden.

View the report at www.TexasPolicy.com.

Upcoming

Both chambers are adjourned until Monday.

Quote of the day

"Free at last, Mr. President."

-- **Sen. Rodney Ellis**, D-Houston, after the Senate approved his bill to increase compensation for those who are wrongly incarcerated. His remarks were addressed to Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst, the Senate's presiding officer.