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Lawmakers attend policy orientation in Austin

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For a handful of lawmakers, the first week of the 82nd legislative session came to a close with in depth conversations on energy policy, public education, border security and Medicaid.

The Texas Public Policy Foundation, a conservative think-tank hosted a two day conference focused on some of the biggest issues facing Texas lawmakers.

State Senator Dan Patrick (R-Houston) participated in a panel discussion called, Making the textbook case for more cost-effective schools.

Sen. Patrick says he wants to dispel the "myth" that Texas does not spend enough money on education.

"In the past 10 years education spending in Texas has increased from \$28 to \$54 billion," Sen. Patrick said.

Sen. Patrick also wants to begin communication on how Texas funds education. Patrick says he wants to consider moving away from property tax dollars and toward sales tax dollars.

Focus of the discussion was also placed on drop-out rates, especially among Hispanic men.

"We cannot be a successful state if you have half of what will be the majority population, Hispanic population, half the males not with a high school education," said Sen. Patrick.

Mayor of Laredo, Raul G. Salinas joined a panel with the Webb County sheriff, and Rep. Aaron Pena (R-Edinburg) to talk about border violence and the Texas economy.

Salinas says that Laredo is the number one inland port which sees 12,000 trucks cross the border with trade.

"We have \$173 billion of trade, international trade, every year with Mexico. In order for us to be successful with the business community, we have to have a safe community," Salinas said.

Mayor Salinas insisted that Texas find a way to keep crime from spilling over the border.

"Maybe they can bring more DPS [Department of Public Safety] people to be on the border on a full-time basis. We don't want a band-aide cure. We want a permanent cure," Salinas said.

Rep. Pena said he has been watching violence on the border ramp up over the last 10 years.

"I went over daily to get lunch or get my haircut or spend time with my friends. Now, not even crossing unless it's absolutely essential. If we don't take care of Mexico than we're hurting ourselves," said Rep. Pena.

This was the 9th year the Texas Public Policy Foundation hosted the Policy Orientation for state lawmakers. Organizers say 60 lawmakers from both sides of the aisle signed up to attend the panel discussions.





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