Gov. Speaks on School Payment

Wednesday, August 06, 2003

Good morning. Because Democrat senators have abdicated their responsibility to taxpayers, today I am compelled to take unique action to ensure our schools receive their August payment from the state through an executive order.

With the support of Lieutenant Governor Dewhurst and Speaker Craddick, I am using the executive authority of my office to stand up for our teachers, librarians, school administrators, taxpayers and school children because they should always come first...before politics...before party.

With an executive order, I am directing the Texas Education Agency to make the August payment from the Foundation School Fund this month instead of deferring it until September.

I believe I have the necessary legal authority for this action.

First, I believe the legislation with a September effective date...House Bill 3459 ...legally controls, meaning schools should be paid on time this month. In addition, overwhelming votes cast by the legislature in the first called session indicate a clear intent that schools should be paid in August.

Additionally, the state budget execution act allows me to order the transfer of foundation school program funds AND to change the timing for when these appropriations are sent to schools.

Unfortunately, the clarifying legislation I spoke of that would have settled any dispute that schools should be paid in August was killed at the last hour when the Senate Democrats walked out. That is why I am compelled to take action with an executive order today – to make sure school children, school teachers and school administrators are not harmed by the Democrats’ actions.
Our goal is to remove the cost of uncertainty for our schools and taxpayers by directing the August payment be made in a timely manner.

We’re talking about $700 million that will go toward insuring adequate funds for teacher and other staff salaries and classroom expenses.

Still unresolved is a concern felt by more than 40 rural school districts across Texas. Democrats who contend they are standing up for rural Texas need to explain to rural Texans why their school districts stand to be short-changed in the coming school year.

Legislation that would have fixed a decrease in state aid for rural school districts was killed at the last minute by the Democrat walkout. Some rural schools will lose state money because the state is now calculating state aid based on locally appraised property values instead of using state values.

While one can argue the merits of such a change in the law, we believe our school districts need more than a couple of months to adjust to such a funding change. Unless the Democrats get back to work, some rural districts may have to fire school employees to make ends meet. Others face the prospect of taking out costly loans.

Here are some examples of school districts that stand to be harmed by less state aid: Muleshoe ISD will lose $215,000…Burkeville ISD will lose $294,000…Waller ISD will lose $662,000. To these small school districts, this is a large percentage of their budget.

Democrats can’t say they’re standing for rural Texas while they turn their backs on more than 40 rural school districts.

The Democrats have found it convenient to attack my record while on the run. But the facts show I have been a long-time supporter of education and health care. This last session I worked to increase spending on health care and public education by more than $2 billion despite a $10 billion budget gap.

In past sessions, I worked to create the Children's Health Insurance Program and the TEXAS Grant Scholarship program, and fought to improve the teaching of core subjects like reading, math and science.

If the Democrats care about important issues like education, trauma funding and transportation, they will come back to Austin and go to work instead of engaging in partisan potshots from beyond our borders.

There is still real work to be done…and it won’t get done until Democrats return from Albuquerque.

Let me allow my good friend, Lieutenant Governor Dewhurst, to offer his comments on these issues