

SUBJECT: Tuition exemptions for Texas National Guard members

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 8 ayes — Rangel, Solis, Bailey, Cuellar, Dunnam, Kamel, Rabuck, E. Reyna
0 nays

WITNESSES: For — None
Against — None
On — John Bohlin

DIGEST: CSHB 269 would allow the governing board of each institution of higher education to exempt an eligible member of the Texas state military forces from the payment of all tuition. To be eligible for the exemption, a student would have to have resided in Texas for the year preceding the semester for which the exemption was sought; remain a member in good standing of the Texas state military forces; and have enlisted or agreed to enlist for a period of additional duty to be determined by the adjutant general.

Persons would not be eligible if they had already received the exemption for 12 semesters or had received a postgraduate or professional degree.

In any semester, the adjutant general could authorize no more than 675 exemptions, and could reserve up to 50 of these exemptions exclusively for the Texas State Guard. The remaining exemptions would be made available to members of certain rank in the Texas National Guard.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally approved by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house and apply beginning with the fall semester of 1997.

SUPPORTERS SAY: CSHB 269 would increase access to higher education for individuals serving the state as members of the Texas State or National Guard. The bill would encourage enlistment with and retention in guard programs, which would

enhance the guard's status and service to the citizens of Texas. Currently, the Texas National Guard is operating at about 94 percent of full capacity, and allowing for tuition exemptions would bring that number up to 100 percent.

Since a National Guard organization at full capacity generally receives more thorough support from the federal government for facilities and training, the tuition exemptions would do much more than just provide education for some guard members — they would increase the overall quality of the guard itself.

Only 675 exemptions per semester could be authorized, so the scale of the program would not become a strain on state finances. Furthermore, the exemption would be up to the discretion of the individual school. The Legislative Budget Board estimates no significant impact for state or local government.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

This session has seen a proliferation of proposals to exempt certain groups — from teacher aides to students from neighboring states — either wholly or in part from tuition requirements. This piecemeal approach could endanger the stability of our tuition system. The Legislature needs to exercise both prudence and consistency in granting exemptions rather than rushing headlong into more exemptions. Such caution is necessary to hold down the financial pressure on our already strapped institutions of higher education and maintain the quality of the education provided to students in Texas.

NOTES:

The original version of the bill would have made the tuition exemption for military reservists mandatory rather than optional and applied only to Texas National Guard members, with no cap on the number of exemptions granted per semester.