

SUBJECT: Authorizing student union fee at UT Permian Basin

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 8 ayes — Rangel, F. Brown, Farabee, Goolsby, J. Jones, Morrison, E. Reyna, Wohlgemuth

0 nays

1 absent — Cuellar

WITNESSES: On — Charles A. Sorber, president, UT Permian Basin; Tammy L. Plowman

DIGEST: HB 229 would authorize the University of Texas System Board of Regents to charge each student at UT Permian Basin up to \$50 per semester to finance, construct, operate, maintain, and improve a student union facility. Students would have to approve the \$50 fee, but the board could set a \$39 fee without a student referendum. The board could prorate the fee for a summer session.

The board could pay obligations with these funds, pursuant to UT System procedures, but could not impose the fee during a semester in which the union building was not used. The Student Union Advisory Committee would administer the funds collected, subject to presidential and board oversight.

HB 229 would take effect beginning with the fall semester of 1999.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 229 would authorize the UT System Board of Regents to charge a student fee for a much-needed student union facility at UT Permian Basin in Odessa. The student union fee is a student-driven initiative. In an April 1998 election, 63 percent of UT Permian Basin students supported the fee. Fifteen percent of the student body went to the polls, a high percentage for student referenda. A student fee is a commonly used mechanism for funding student unions at other state campuses.

The UT Permian Basin campus now has no student union building. The university would use the fee for a \$1.1 million overhaul of an old library building to serve that purpose. The building would be removed from the general revenue budget and maintained by the student union fees. Student

surveys drove the renovation plans, which include a commons area, student life and student organization offices, student senate/program board offices, and other features designed to enhance the learning and living environment on campus.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

A per-semester fee would increase the cost of higher education. Some students at the university already have difficulty paying for their education, and all would be forced to pay the student union fee regardless of whether they support or use the facility.

NOTES:

The companion bill, SB 758 by Duncan, has been referred to the Senate Education Subcommittee on Higher Education.