

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The importance of higher education to the State of Texas is indisputable. The state's system of higher education fuels economic and social progress, promotes cultural development, and provides the individual with a means to achieve his or her fullest potential as a successful and productive citizen.

Higher education is equally important to the quality of life of the state's various identifiable regions. However, like the state's abundant natural and economic wealth, its higher education resources are not uniformly distributed to all its regions, which can pose a serious problem in a state as large and culturally diverse as Texas.

The meager resources that South Texas colleges and universities have at their disposal present a significant impediment to the advancement and diversification of the region's economy. This is particularly distressing for a region that is the state's poorest and one that despite its many social problems is making a valiant effort to become an equal partner in the future development and prosperity of Texas.

A Call for a Fair Share of the Resources

In 1986, South Texans took advantage of opportunities to inform state leaders of their plight. At a hearing in Corpus Christi of the Select Committee on Higher Education, South Texans charged that their region was seriously deficient in higher education resources and that this longstanding condition was being perpetuated by state funding levels and policies of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and, in fact, was deteriorating in relation to other regions of the state. They expressed great pride in their public institutions of higher education and believed that the achievements of those institutions and their committed educators were truly remarkable considering the low state investment and support.

It was pointed out that the five senior colleges in South Texas combined do not have an academic program profile equal to that of a comprehensive regional state university like Texas Tech University. They eloquently asserted that the rapidly growing population of South Texas requires a richer mix of academic degree programs and that statewide standards of duplication and need must

be adjusted to accommodate the realities of regional deprivation.

The Select Committee on Higher Education did not address directly the problems of South Texas in its final report. The committee did submit as a basic principle that "Higher education should be accessible to all citizens who seek and qualify for admission." South Texans agree and submit that the application of this principle in their region is severely wanting.

Another interim committee, the Task Force on Border Economic Development, in its 1986 report to the Legislature did address directly education issues in South Texas. It confirmed that a lack of educational opportunity was a major obstacle to progress in South Texas and the border region and recommended that the area's higher education institutions be authorized to expand substantially their mix of degree programs, particularly at the professional, graduate, and doctoral levels.

The 70th Legislature

The 70th Legislature in 1987 considered a number of bills relating to higher education in South Texas. These included measures to create a five-institution South Texas University System, to enhance the scope and mission of Corpus Christi State University and Pan American University, to establish a law school in the Valley, and to elevate the status of the upper-level centers, Laredo State University and Pan American University at Brownsville. Except for the legislation relating to the status of Laredo State University and the authority of the Coordinating Board to abolish it, the measures died with the end of the regular session, unable to compete for attention with the monumental task of balancing the state budget.

Several members of the Legislature saw the need for a study of higher education in South Texas that could result in the formulation of a coordinated response to the region's obvious unprivileged status. In the 2nd Called Session, Senator Carlos F. Truan authored Senate Resolution 124 to create a special senate committee that would review the status of South Texas universities and the issue of their becoming components of The University of Texas System or The Texas A&M University System. The resolution, which was co-sponsored by Senators Carl Parker, Hector Uribe, and Judith Zaffirini, was adopted on July 20, 1987.

Similar legislation was introduced in the House of Representatives by Representative Eddie Cavazos, with 10 other house members as co-sponsors.

the poorest MSAs in the year 2000, and all four South Texas MSAs will be below the state average in per capita income in the year 2000.

Unemployment Rates. The extremely low per capita income is a direct result of the region's high unemployment rates. South Texas' unemployment rate of 13 percent is the highest in the state and is almost twice the state average of 7.1 percent. Again, the picture worsens when one looks at the urban population centers where unemployment is even higher. Figures released by the Texas Employment Commission for September 1988 show that in McAllen/Edinburg/Mission the unemployment rate is 18 percent, in Brownsville/Harlingen it is 12.4 percent, and in Laredo it is 12.1 percent.

When unemployment rates are compared by county, a broad pattern emerges. Those counties nearest the border between Texas and Mexico generally have the higher rates of unemployment. Two counties (Maverick and Starr) have unemployment rates above 25 percent. Webb, Hidalgo, and Cameron counties, among the most populous counties in the region, have unemployment rates of 12.2, 18, and 12.4 percent, respectively. The two counties with the lowest rates, Kenedy with 2 and McMullen with 2.3, are also the least populated, with populations of 661 and 944 residents, respectively.

The low per capita income and the high unemployment rates are indicators of South Texas' primarily agricultural economy. However, the economic stasis and the relative failure of the region to produce a diverse and growing economy can be traced to the lack of the educational resources in the region that are necessary to produce or to lure new business to the region.

Socioeconomic Characteristics of Ethnic Populations
Generally. The poor economic portrait of South Texas is due largely to the ethnic composition of the region and the preponderance of Hispanics in the population, a group that historically has been and continues to be economically and educationally disadvantaged. Minorities such as blacks and Hispanics have unemployment rates twice as high as those for whites (6.9, 6.4, and 3.4, respectively). The mean family incomes for blacks and Hispanics (\$15,573 and \$15,670) are 60 percent of the average family income for whites (\$24,787). Furthermore, the percentage of minority group members living below the poverty level (generally defined as an income of \$11,650 a year for a family of four) is more than twice as high as that of whites. About 27.6 percent of blacks and 28 percent of Hispanics live in poverty compared to about 11.5 percent of whites.

IX. HEALTH CARE

1. The Committee finds that the public health problems in South Texas are severe, especially in the border area. These health problems are exacerbated by the lack of public health resources and medical personnel in the region. The state and its health science centers should work together to provide the appropriate services and medical personnel to the region.

2. The Committee applauds the establishment of a task force composed of The University of Texas Health Science Centers and the Medical Branch dedicated toward developing medical service and training programs in the South Texas region. The Committee urges The University of Texas to continue its work in developing new proposals to meet the health care needs in South Texas.

3. The Committee recommends that the special item budget request for extended health care services in South Texas submitted jointly by The University of Texas System and Pan American University be funded by the state.

4. The Committee recommends that the state establish more medical residency programs for family practice physicians in South Texas. There is an acute shortage of doctors in the border area and studies have shown that physicians often establish their practice in the area where they complete their residencies.

5. The Committee supports an increase in the Physician Student Loan Repayment Program, which repays up to \$9,000 annually on student loans for physicians who locate in rural or underserved areas. In addition, the Committee finds that the program should be extended to selected nursing and allied health professions.

6. The Committee supports the establishment of an Area Health Education Center (AHEC) to supply health education and services in the Rio Grande Valley.

7. The Committee supports the efforts by Baylor College of Medicine to establish a Nurse-Midwife Program in South Texas.

X. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

1. The state should fund The University of Texas' initiative to establish a consortium of Texas Centers for Border and Enterprise Economic Development at South Texas universities to provide:

- * Economic data base development and management services
- * Economic development planning and research services
- * Technical assistance to industrial/government entities to work directly with maquiladora programs

2. The Legislature should direct that a study be conducted to investigate border economies to see what kind of incentives would encourage businesses to move to South Texas and the kinds of training and education public and higher education should provide in the region.

3. The state should expand technical assistance to South Texas businesses through such agencies as Pan American University's Center for Entrepreneurship and Economic Development. The mesquite program at Texas A&I University's Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute has shown how research spin-offs can promote economic diversification and development.

4. The Legislature should increase to \$100,000 the line-item appropriation to the Texas State Technical Institute's Harlingen campus for technical assistance to companies considering plant expansion and new plant start-up in the Rio Grande Valley.

CHAPTER III

HEALTH CARE RESOURCES IN SOUTH TEXAS

Poverty, inadequate health care, and ignorance of proper health maintenance are closely related. Many of the areas in South Texas are among the poorest in the nation, and the health care situation in the area reflects that fact. While much of this report is dedicated to the relationship between the poverty of the region and the lack of access to higher education, the health care deficiencies in the region cannot be neglected. To the degree that the state's institutions of higher education can ameliorate this problem, they should do so.

The future growth of the region will occur precisely among those groups which are in greatest need of health care services. South Texas has a very young population relative to the rest of the state, reflected in a higher proportion of infants and of women of child-bearing age. In addition, the elderly population of the region shares the rapid growth characteristic of these age groups. The growth in the number of the elderly in South Texas mirrors national trends, especially when the large number of winter visitors is taken into account.

Frequent health problems in the area include a number of diseases which are declining in other parts of the country. Many of the health problems in South Texas are caused by high rates of communicable diseases: infectious hepatitis, measles, tuberculosis, typhoid fever, and enteric diseases. Infants in the area are particularly subject to malignant neoplasms. Children suffer from acute intestinal and respiratory infections and dental problems at high rates.

South Texans also suffer in disproportionate numbers from a number of health care problems which have a high incidence among Hispanics, such as respiratory diseases, diabetes, joint problems, and high blood pressure. Finally, violence is also a frequent cause of health problems.

The number of doctors and nurses available to serve the health care needs of South Texas is dramatically low. The Texas Department of Health (TDH) has designated 16 of South Texas' 24 counties as Primary Health Manpower Shortage Areas (HMSAs), meaning that they lack enough physicians to satisfy the needs of the local population. The counties designated as HMSAs in whole or in part are Atascosa, Bee, Cameron, Dimmit, Duval, Frio, Hidalgo, La Salle, Live Oak, McMullen, Maverick, Starr, Webb, Willacy, Zapata, and