

## Bill requires review of university systems

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### Review may help determine where state money is given

#### By Ben Heath

High-ranking academic officials said Thursday a broad review of Texas' six university systems could lead to a more standardized method of distributing state money for higher education.

Bills introduced last week in the state House and Senate would require that the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board review the operations of each university system administration.

Though the bill does not directly call for a look into how the state funds the systems, both Lee Jackson, North Texas system chancellor, and Diane Corley, Texas State University system spokeswoman, hope a state review would uncover the need for such a process.

"There is no uniformity now in funding," Corley said. "I think finding a common method for all the systems would be a good thing."

Jerry Gaston, deputy chancellor with the Texas A&M system, said a standard formula for funding Texas systems would be beneficial, but warned that a "simple-minded" formula would ignore the differences between systems.

Jackson said the UNT system is not concerned that the study

could lead to significant and unwanted changes in the way systems do business, adding that the state has always allowed the systems a certain level of autonomy.

"I don't think there's a desire on the part of the state Legislature ... to come in and completely

regulate the administration of the universities," Jackson said.

Rep. David Swinford, R-Amarillo, did not cite a state funding mechanism as one of his goals for the legislation.

"We just want to know," Swinford said. "We think that, since we [give] a lot of money to higher education, we need to know more about it."

Swinford authored the original House bill, one of many dealing with governmental reorganization, which included a requirement for the Coordinating Board to review all university systems. That bill has since died and a new measure, authored by Rep. Pete Gallego, D-Alpine, has replaced it.

Gallego's bill calls for an investigation into the organizational structure of all six university systems, and the identification of the major functions of all system offices. It directs the board to make recommendations on how the state could save money by reorganizing system offices or reducing personnel.

"It may not produce any suggestions. We don't know," Swinford said. "We're putting a lot of money into these things, and we ought to know what's going on in there."

When the Legislature considered a similar measure last spring, the Coordinating Board said such a study would cost about \$300,000. Board spokeswoman Deborah Greene called the cost significant because some of the required subjects in the study are outside the board's usual scope, and would require them to bring in outside expertise.

Greene said she thinks the study will compile data so that public officials will be able to access it more easily.

Also, she said the study could help with comparing the systems, and one system could possibly learn new organizational strategies from another.

"I think [the Legislature] would hope that we can highlight where savings might be made, but until we start digging, I can't specify on what those would be," she said.

According to the Coordinating Board's Web site, the six university systems in Texas include the UT System, the Texas A&M System, the Texas State University System, the University of North Texas System, the Texas Tech System and the University of Houston System.