

- SUBJECT:** Creating the Texas Fund for Geography Education
- COMMITTEE:** Higher Education — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 8 ayes — Rangel, F. Brown, Farabee, J. Jones, Morrison, E. Reyna, Uher, West
0 nays
1 absent — Goolsby
- WITNESSES:** For — Sharon Cassady, Marci Smith Deal, Ellen J. Foster, Lanny Proffer
Against — None
On — Sarah W. Bednarz
- BACKGROUND:** As part of its 100th Anniversary celebration in 1988, the National Geographic Society created a foundation dedicated to geography education and endowed it with \$20 million. The purpose of the fund is to support geography education programs, such as professional development for teachers and administrators, curriculum materials, exhibitions, and resource collections. Geography education covers a diverse array of topics, including political boundaries, impact caused by animals and humans, environmental hazards (floods, earthquakes, etc.), water resources, and cultural and historical geography.
- The society set aside another \$20 million in challenge funds to match every dollar contributed to the foundation. Sixteen states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Canada, and the city of Chicago have taken advantage of the matching funds to establish their own endowment in conjunction with the society.
- DIGEST:** CSHB 3590 would establish the Texas Fund for Geography Education, an endowment with the stated purposes of supporting and improving the quality of geographic education programs in Texas and promoting a better understanding of Texas by Texas residents.

The bill would permit the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to enter into an agreement with the National Geographic Society of Washington, D.C. to operate the endowment fund. The bill would allow deposits to the fund only in an amount equal to matching funds deposited to the fund by the society from other sources, and would require the society to provide an annual report on the fund. If THECB determined that the purposes of the fund were not being accomplished, the fund would be dissolved, and one-half of the balance would be distributed to the general revenue fund, with the remainder returned to donors of any amount deposited for the preceding five years in proportion to the amount of the donation, and any remainder to the society. THECB could transfer to the society any amount for deposit appropriated for that purpose. The bill would require the society to award grants from the fund to higher education institutions to promote the fund's stated purposes.

THECB would appoint a seven-member advisory committee composed of people with expertise and interest in geography education to assist the society in awarding grants from the fund. The committee also would solicit grant proposals from higher education institutions on behalf of the society, and would recommend those that best promoted the fund's purpose to the society. The committee would be subject to Government Code, chapter 2110, which sets forth guidelines for state agency advisory committees.

THECB would report to the governor and the Legislature not later than December 1 of each even-numbered year. The report would contain the value of the fund and membership of the committee as of September 1, a summary of each project supported by the fund during the preceding biennium, and other information the board considered appropriate.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2001.

SUPPORTERS
SAY:

CSHB 3590 would reaffirm Texas' stated position that geography education is important. The National Geographic Society has offered to establish an endowment fund for geography education in Texas, the Texas Fund for Geography Education. To participate, the State of Texas would need to deposit up to \$500,000 in matching funds in the society's state endowment

account. While the society would control the fund, a state advisory committee would make funding recommendations. CSHB 3590 would establish the fund.

The state already includes geography as part of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEAKS), the core curriculum for Texas public school students. Eighth grade students are tested on geography on the TAAS test, and 10th grade students will be tested on geography when the revised TAAS test is implemented. Continued geography education for teachers — including grade school teachers, social studies teachers, and science teachers — would enhance their ability to teach geography to students and likely would result in higher TAAS geography scores.

The bill would support much-needed geography education. A 1988 Gallup poll found that one in seven young Americans could not identify the United States on a map, and one in four could not identify the Pacific Ocean. Geography education includes teaching why people and things are where they are and how they relate to each other. It is important for students to understand how a change in one place produces a consequence in another. Geography plays a key role in helping students to understand the economic, social, and political development of Texas, the United States, and the world. Geography can be used to introduce the scientific method, a framework for analyzing environmental issues, and to bridge science and social studies. Use of maps and graphics sharpen visual comprehension and can develop students' reading skills.

This bill would demonstrate Texas' appreciation for, and support of, programs the society already has funded in Texas. Because Texas attaches importance to geography education, the society already has awarded over \$1.5 million in grants to Texas programs, including the Texas Alliance for Geography Education. The society also sponsors the National Geography Bee and Geography Awareness Week.

This bill would require a one-time grant of \$500,000, which would not be an ongoing appropriation. The appropriation would be matched dollar for dollar and would create a self-sustaining educational endowment to support one of Texas' stated educational priorities. An endowment would provide continued funding for geography education in Texas without additional appropriations

to support them in perpetuity. The society would pay to invest and manage the money, but all of the earnings would be dedicated to geography education in Texas. The pay-out rate for the fund would be calculated annually to provide for growth as well as expenditure. Some of the older endowments that began with a million dollars have doubled while continuing to make grants each year. Funding this endowment would be an investment in the future of geography education in Texas.

The bill would place sufficient safeguards on the transfer of money to the fund. In 1999, the Attorney General (AG) concluded that the Legislature only could appropriate funds to a state agency for transfer to a private endowment if the Legislature determined that the expenditure served a public purpose and required the agency to place sufficient contractual controls on the transaction to ensure the public purpose is carried out. (Opinion No. JC-0146, November 16, 1999). Further, the AG stated that the authority of the state agency to transfer the funds and enter into a contract with the requisite controls must be supported by substantive law, and the appropriation must be sufficiently specific. CSHB 3590 would meet all of those requirements. It would provide a specific purpose and would place specify conditions on the committee's contract with the society. The bill also would grant clear statutory authority for THECB to transfer funds.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

No apparent opposition.

NOTES:

The committee substitute renamed the fund the Texas Fund for Geography Education rather than the National Geographic Society Texas Fund. The substitute modified the dissolution provisions by adding the return to donors section. It also added new language that would require the society to award grants to institutions of higher education to promote the purposes of the fund. The bill as filed would have required a report summarizing each project funded during the current biennium, while the substitute would require the report to cover each project funded during the previous biennium. The substitute also changed the effective date.

The House version of SB 1 by Ellis, the fiscal 2002-03 general appropriations bill, includes contingency funding for the Texas Fund for Geography Education in the Article 11 wish list.