

- SUBJECT:** Changing the name of Southwest Texas State University
- COMMITTEE:** Higher Education — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 6 ayes — Morrison, F. Brown, Chavez, Goolsby, J. Jones, Mercer  
0 nays  
3 absent — Giddings, Nixon, Smithee
- WITNESSES:** For — Robert T. Doerr, Justin Fischer, Justin McGarry, and Kyle V. Morris, Associated Student Government of Southwest Texas State University; Carla Graham, SWT Bobcat Athletic Foundation and SWT Development Foundation; Christopher Jones II, Black Student Alliance and College of Liberal Arts; Ernie R. Dominguez; Shannon FitzPatrick; Thomas J. McDonald  
Against — Scott Friedeck; Bryan McClung
- BACKGROUND:** Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos is the state's sixth largest public university and is part of the Texas State University System, which also includes Sul Ross State University, Angelo State University, Sam Houston State University, and Lamar University.
- DIGEST:** HB 1961 would change the name of Southwest Texas State University to Texas State University at San Marcos and would amend references in the Education Code and Government Code to reflect that change. Appropriations for the use and benefit of Southwest Texas State University would be available for the use and benefit of Texas State University at San Marcos. The board of regents and administration would have to ensure that the name change was implemented with as little expense as possible, and, to the maximum extent possible, use all stationery and other consumable supplies printed with the former name.  
  
The bill would take effect September 1, 2003.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

HB 1961 would change the perception of Southwest Texas State as a regional institution and would support the university's development as a research institution. Directional terms like "Southwest" in the name of higher education institutions often are associated with small regional facilities that serve local students. This is misleading in the case of Southwest Texas State, an emerging university at the forefront of research in some areas.

This would be the institution's fifth name change since it opened in 1903. Each name has reflected the university's growth from a small teacher's college to a major, multipurpose university. SWT's original mission was to prepare Texas public school teachers, especially those of south central Texas. It became renowned for carrying out this mission, but today it does far more. Once again, it is time to change the name of the institution to reflect this broader mission.

The institution would become known as TSU-San Marcos and would not be confused with other institutions that have the same acronym, such as Texas Southern University. Other institutions, such as Tarleton State University, also have this acronym and have not experienced problems.

This name change has been in the works publicly for at least four years and had the support of former President Supple before he left the university last year. The board of regents chose not to take a position because of the division among alumnae and students, but this should not prevent the Legislature from carrying out the will of a majority of students and alumni. While a formal vote on the matter has not occurred, informal polls indicate strong support for the change. The name change has been supported by the Development Office, the Alumnae Board, and the Athletic Foundation.

The estimated \$340,000 cost associated with the name change would be covered by private donations and would entail no cost for the state. Supporters have committed as much as \$1.4 million to cover these costs.

This name change would improve education in Texas by creating more prestige and national recognition for a university that is on the way to becoming one of the state's premier higher education institutions.

**OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

HB 1961 would go over the heads of students, alumni, and the university's board of regents to change the name of the only Texas higher education institution that has a U.S. president (Lyndon B. Johnson) as an alumnus. The term "Southwest" distinguishes the institution from other state universities and should not be removed from the name. Thousands of alumni are proud to be graduates of the institution as it is named, and they do not support this change.

The bill's supporters have taken this issue to the Legislature without a formal referendum or vote by students or faculty. Informal polls suggest widespread opposition to the change. Before the Legislature becomes involved, the issue should be put to a formal vote by students and alumni.

A name change alone would not affect the university's status and prestige. National recognition comes from the achievements of students and faculty, regardless of the institution's name.

Donors loyal to Southwest Texas State might choose not to contribute to a school with a different name. Even though the Development Office has supported the name change, individual alumni may express their opposition to the name change with their checkbooks.

Changing the institution's name would require resources, time, and effort that should be put to more productive uses.

**NOTES:**

The companion bill, SB 928 by Wentworth, was considered in a public hearing on March 24 by the Senate Education Subcommittee on Higher Education and left pending.