



NOVEMBER 23, 2009 - AUSTIN, TEXAS

CONTACT: florence.shapiro@senate.state.tx.us or 512/463-0108

SHAPIRO TAPPED TO CHAIR TASK FORCE FOR CONSERVATIVE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Against the backdrop of a bleak fiscal picture in other states, the Texas Conservative Coalition Research Institute (TCCRI) announced nine issue-specific Task Forces to examine the unfolding disaster in California and to build on the success of Texas polices. State Senator Florence Shapiro joins the TCCRI as chair of the taskforce on Western Civilization and American Traditions, examining the role and importance of America's core values in modern-day Texas.

The Taskforce on Western Civilization and American Traditions will discuss the role and importance of America's core values in modern-day Texas, as well as policy proposals to further understanding of Western civilization and American traditions among students at state public schools and institutions of higher education.

"America occupies a unique position within contemporary Western civilization," Shapiro said. "Our position as the most prosperous and free society in the world comes from the traditions and culture set forth by our founding fathers - equal rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Our Constitution spells out the need for knowledge in order to preserve those rights and liberties. This task force will look at how we can guarantee that knowledge is being imparted to all Texas students."

Task Forces are the backbone of the Institute's research and education efforts. Based on the conservative principles that underpin TCCRI, the Task Forces will develop legislative leaders and sound public policy ideas to assist the Legislature in keeping Texas an example of success for the rest of the nation to follow. The other 2009-2010 TCCRI Task Forces include: State Budget, Health & Human Services, Property Tax & School Finance, Transportation, Government Reform, Economic & Workforce Development, and Insurance.

State Representative Warren Chisum (R-Pampa), president of TCCRI and chairman of the TCCRI State Budget Task Force, said: "Texas must continue with principled governance that is based on fiscal restraint, low taxation, and individual liberty. TCCRI Task Forces will lay the foundation for the future growth and success of our state."

Rep. Lois Kolkhorst (R-Brenham) will co-chair the Western Civilization task force with Sen. Shapiro. Other task force chairs include: State Budget - Sen. Tommy Williams (R-The Woodlands); Health & Human Services - Rep. John Davis (R-Houston) and Sen. Jane Nelson (R-Flower Mound); School Finance - Rep. Phil King (R-Weatherford) and Sen. Dan Patrick (R-Houston); Transportation - Rep. Linda Harper-Brown (R-Irving) and Sen. Mike Jackson (R-La Porte); Insurance - Rep. Larry Taylor (R-Friendswood) and Sen. Glenn Hegar (R-Katy); Energy & the Environment - Rep. Kelly Hancock (R-North Richland Hills) and Sen. Troy Fraser (R-Horseshoe Bay); Government Reform - Rep. Bill Callegari (R-Katy) and Sen. Bob Deuell (R-Greenville); Economic Development - Rep. Tan Parker (R-Flower Mound) and Sen. Craig Estes (R-Wichita Falls).

JOBS AND EDUCATION FOR TEXANS AWARDS FIRST SCHOLARSHIPS THROUGH EVERY CHANCE FUND

During the 81st session, Sen. Shapiro focused heavily on post-secondary readiness with the goal in mind to create a better-educated workforce for the 21st Century. As part of that goal, she worked on career and technical education legislation to create a "Jobs and Education for Texans" Fund, to provide grants and scholarships to prepare students for careers in high-demand technical occupations. The fund is overseen by the Comptroller and is now called the "Every Chance Fund." It funds two separate programs - \$5 million in Career and Technical Scholarship Fund for student scholarships for tuition and fees at community and technical colleges split over two years; and \$10 million in the Launchpad Fund to support and expand existing nonprofit programs with proven success in training unemployed and underemployed workers for in-demand jobs. An \$10 million will go to startup funding in career and technical education programs.

The Career and Technical Scholarship Fund provides tuition grants for 54 Texas community colleges and public technical institutes. Recipient schools will award scholarships to students enrolled in a training program for high-demand occupations, such as engineering technology, welding, computer support, etc., where a certificate or associate degree is a basic prerequisite. Already this year, \$2.5 million has been awarded, and another \$2.5 million is slated to be given out in 2010-2011, to help build a workforce with the skills Texas employers need.

The \$10 million Launchpad Fund recently awarded \$3.5 million to the following nonprofit organizations:

- \$500,000 Project QUEST, Inc., San Antonio
- \$500,000 Project ARRIBA, El Paso
- \$500,000 Capital IDEA, Austin
- \$500,000 H.I.S. BridgeBuilders, Dallas
- \$400,000 Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement, Weslaco
- \$300,000 Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement, Weslaco
- \$300,000 Liberty County Workforce Academy, Dayton
- \$250,000 Capital IDEA, Austin
- \$250,000 East Texas Literacy Council, Longview

For more information about these funds, visit www.everychanceeverytexan.org/funds.

SHAPIRO AWARDED EXCELLENCE IN ADVOCACY AWARD BY TEXAS DENTAL ASSOCIATION

Sen. Shapiro was among four legislators recognized this session with the Texas Dental Association's "Excellence in Advocacy" award. This honor was given to members who were instrumental in helping TDA accomplish its legislative goals, such as SB 455 by Shapiro, to improve access to dental care by enabling dentists to delegate additional duties to dental assistants.

Other honorees included Sen. Carlos Uresti (D-San Antonio) for his work on SB 1048 requiring dental insurance to be included with health insurance in a child support order; as well as Rep. Chuck Hopson (R-Jacksonville), who carried the companion to SB 455, and Rep. Lois Kolkhorst (R-Brenham), chair of the House Public Health Committee.

STATE NEWS

TEXAS TOMORROW FUND CHANGES NULL AND VOID

The Texas Prepaid Higher Education Tuition Board has voted to revert to its former policy on refunds for cancelled contracts. This means that cancelled contracts will be refunded in full, including initial investment and interest accrued. Any changes to this policy will be taken up by the Legislature in 2011.

FLU UPDATE

Texas has still not received its full allocation of the H1N1 vaccine, however, you can stay updated at www.texasflu.org.

The Texas Education Agency has also set up a website to address flu concerns in schools at www.tea.state.tx.us.

In Dallas County, a hotline has been set up for parents of uninsured children to schedule appointments for their children to get the vaccine. That hotline number is 214-819-6001. Additionally, a walk-in clinic for other uninsured high-risk Dallas County residents is open at the Dallas County Health and Human Services building located at 2377 N. Stemmons Freeway.

Dallas County citizens interested in receiving the vaccination should check the Dallas County Department of Health and Human Services website for frequent updates. Appointments are being accepted on a day-by-day basis at select clinics around the county. In addition, 16,000 doses of the vaccination have been allocated to more than 100 area pharmacies:

- Ben Franklin Pharmacy
- CVS Pharmacies
- Dougherty's Pharmacies
- Kroger Pharmacies
- Las Colinas Pharmacy
- Preston Road Pharmacy
- Tom Thumb Pharmacies
- Walgreens Pharmacies
- Walmart Stores

A list of participating locations, as well as updates on clinic appointments is available at www.dallascounty.org/departments/hhservices/SeasonalInfluenza.html.

Collin County Health Care Services has received 6,500 doses of H1N1 influenza vaccine. Doses have been, and are being, distributed to: multiple area hospitals, emergency medical workers, first responders, shelter populations, and the following contracted clinics who can serve low-income pregnant women and children four years of age or older. H1N1 vaccine doses are available free, while supplies last, to pregnant women and children four years of age or older at the following locations:

- Express Health - McKinney
1505 Harroun Street, Suite C
McKinney, Texas 75070
972-548-2722
Hours of Operation: Monday-Friday 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM
- PrimaCare - McKinney
1920 W. Eldorado Parkway
McKinney, Texas 75069
469-952-3737
Hours of Operation: Monday-Friday 8:00 AM - 9:00 PM,
Saturday & Sunday 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM
- PrimaCare - Plano
3304 Alma Drive
Plano, Texas 75023
972-424-6581
Hours of Operation: Monday-Friday 8:00 AM - 9:00 PM,
Saturday & Sunday 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM

The County is currently finalizing plans with multiple clinics and additional community locations that will provide the H1N1 vaccine to best serve the public's need. Once these plans are finalized and vaccine doses are received, additional information will be released to the general public. As more vaccine becomes available, the County will continue to distribute it countywide to serve additional high-risk groups identified by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) as high-priority H1N1 vaccination populations. All individuals in these high-risk groups, listed in no particular order, are encouraged to get the H1N1 vaccine as soon as additional doses become available:

- Pregnant women
- Household contacts and caregivers for children younger than six months of age
- Healthcare and emergency medical services personnel
- All persons from 6 months through 24 years old
- Persons 25 through 64 years old who have health conditions associated with higher risk of medical complications from influenza disease.

To protect against becoming sick, take the following steps:

- Cover your cough! -- Make sure to cough or sneeze into a tissue or sleeve to prevent the spread of germs.
- Wash your hands! -- Thorough hand washing with soap and water is the best way to get rid of germs; Alcohol based hand sanitizers are also recommended when soap and water are not available.
- Keep hands off! - Germs are easily spread from person to person or person to surfaces when you touch your eyes, nose or mouth first.
- Sick? Stay home! - Staying home from school or work when you are ill helps prevent the spread of illness.

SENATE TRANSPORTATION & HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE HEARING

The Senate Committee on Transportation & Homeland Security met recently in El Paso to hear updates from various state agencies on issues of importance to the committee.

The committee heard from the Department of Public Safety, as well as local officials, about the importance of protecting the Texas-Mexico border. Law enforcement officials along the border need tools to combat local gang crime connected to the drug cartels.

The committee also discussed the funding problems for our state's transportation infrastructure. The revenue derived from the state's fuel tax is not enough to cover the needs of the state, and we will soon run out of money for building new capacity projects. This interim, the committee must review this dilemma to come up with solutions for the 2011 legislative session.

STATE AGENCIES UNDER REVIEW

Twenty-eight state agencies, several of which have faced scrutiny for internal problems in recent years, will be up for review by the Sunset Advisory Commission as part of its biennial review.

This 12-member commission is charged with reviewing policies and programs of more than 150 state agencies. Their goal is to determine the need for each agency, find any duplications of other public services or programs and consider changes to improve each agency's operations and activities.

Among the agencies coming up for review are the Texas Youth Commission, which was put under conservatorship after allegations of abuse of some of its residents arose. It has since undergone a restructuring and downsizing, with a new board and new executive director.

Another large state agency, the Texas Department of Transportation, has had some of its internal policies and communications processes scrutinized as well.

Other major agencies to be subjected to sunset review include the Electric Reliability Council of Texas, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs, The Texas Department of Information Resources and the Public Utility Commission of Texas. To view the complete list of agencies up for review, visit <http://www.sunset.state.tx.us/2011.htm>.

TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION APPROVES HIGHWAY FUNDING

This week, the Texas Transportation Commission acted unanimously to approve roughly \$2 billion in highway projects aimed at increasing safety, rehabilitating pavement, expanding highway corridors of statewide significance and reducing traffic congestion in communities across the state. The projects will be funded by Proposition 12 bond proceeds, which were authorized by the Texas Legislature earlier this year.

Many in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex argued against the list of projects approved by the Commission, as the area will only receive about \$126 million for rehabilitation and safety projects. Along with several other North Texas Senators, Senator Shapiro sent a letter to the Transportation Commission urging them to reconsider, however, the Commission ultimately approved the original recommendation.

"While maintenance is critically important, the Dallas-Fort Worth area is the fourth largest metropolitan area in the country, contains many congested roadways, and is in a non-attainment zone. In order to continue attracting residents and businesses to the region, we must improve its transportation system."

STUDY COMMISSION ON REGION C WATER SUPPLY

The Study Commission on Region C Water Supply met recently at the University of Texas at Dallas campus in Richardson. The Commission is tasked with taking a closer look at alternative water sources reasonably equivalent to the proposed Marvin Nichols Reservoir.

The Region C Water Planning Group makes recommendations for the State Water Plan to provide for the water needs of the 13 county region in North Texas. The proposed Marvin Nichols Reservoir is currently in the State Water Plan as a recommended future water source.

At Friday's meeting, the Commission heard from a consultant regarding data gaps that exist with various reports and studies that have been conducted on all the possible alternative sources. The Commission will work to fill these gaps, in order to have as much data as possible, by the report deadline in December 2010.

DISTRICT NEWS

CONDOLENCES TO JACK SINGLEY FAMILY AND IRVING ISD

Irving lost its longest-serving leader earlier this year, when Superintendent Jack Singley, retired, but Texas has lost a great public servant now with his untimely passing last month. He began his career as a math teacher at MacArthur High School in 1965 after graduating from Texas A&M University. After teaching for three years, he quickly moved up the ranks and took over the district in 1988. He saw the district through unprecedented growth and changes in demographics over his 21-year tenure. He was a staunch advocate for access to technology for all students, and career readiness. Donations in his memory can be made to the Irving Schools Foundation Jack Singley Scholarship fund.

ETF FUNDS TO NORTH TEXAS COMPANIES

The Texas Emerging Technology Fund recently announced ETF investments in nine innovative North Texas companies. Congratulations to the following ventures:

- 2Cimple, Inc., Dallas
- Advanced Receiver Technologies (RRT), Dallas
- Bynari, Dallas
- Device Fidelity, Inc., Richardson
- Interoperate.biz Inc., Plano
- Net.orange, Dallas
- OnTrack Imaging, Inc., Flower Mound
- Vahara Systems, Inc., Dallas

For more information on the Emerging Technology Fund and how to apply for funding, visit www.emergingtechfund.com.

COLLIN COLLEGES PARTNERS WITH AREA UNIVERSITIES

A few weeks ago, the Higher Education Coordinating Board announced that Texas has seen its greatest one year enrollment increase. 113,000 new students enrolled this year, that's a 9% increase in one year. A large portion of that increase is because of the economy. Now more than ever people find higher education as a critical component to attaining sustainable jobs in this tough economic climate.

That's why this Higher Education Center will play such an important role to the economic revitalization of North Texas. Students may take advantage of a wealth of higher education opportunities right in their own backyard. Too often, people have limited choices in their higher education opportunities because they have family and responsibilities that keep them in a specific community. But with this new innovative model, a student could enroll at A&M Commerce or UNT without ever leaving the Collin College campus.

The Higher Education Center will also provide a seamless transition process. Currently, only 15% of students who enroll in community college go on to transfer and complete at a four year institution. While part of that number can be attributed to students who wish to complete only their associates degree, all too often that number can be attributed to students who find that many of their courses won't transfer to a four year institution. become overwhelmed and lost when they get to the four year institution. That's why this Higher Education Center is such a great opportunity for students. Students will be able to get on the right track early to ensure that their courses will transfer. Students will not risk being overwhelmed at their new four year institution. I am confident that this new Higher Education Center will completely change the way students think about higher education, and more will go on to complete their four year degree than ever before.

DALLAS PARTNERSHIP FOCUSES ON WELLNESS

A public-private partnership in South Dallas is aiming at providing for both health care and wellness needs of the people in that area. Baylor Health Care has invested \$15 million in a project to transform the city's Juanita J. Craft Recreation Center into a diabetes health and wellness institute. The institute will provide a physician, a nurse practitioner, diabetes management educator, and referral coordinator for specialty and ancillary care. Those using the facility will also have access to affordable medications, nutrition and health cooking classes and exercise programs.

UNT NETS \$310K GRANT FOR STUDENT INITIATIVE

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has awarded the University of North Texas a \$310,000 grant to boost enrollment among first-generation college students through its G-Force initiative, part of the Closing the Gaps program aimed at enrolling 630,000 more students in Texas colleges and universities by 2015.

"The work performed by G-Force mentors directly impacts the lives of the thousands of (potential college) students," said Patrick Vasquez, director of UNT's Office of Outreach and Community Involvement. He said high school students whose parents did not complete bachelor's degrees receive "encouragement, mentorship and learn how to complete college applications, write scholarship essays and understand the financial aid application process" through the program.

UNT's G-Force program operates through nine Go Centers located at the following districts:

- Dallas Independent School District (L.G. Pinkston High School, Roosevelt High School and Thomas Jefferson High School);
- Decatur Independent School District (Decatur High School);
- Denton Independent School District (Denton High School and Ryan High School);
- Fort Worth Independent School District (Diamond Hill-Jarvis High School and O.D. Wyatt High School); and
- Frisco Independent School District (Wakeland High School).

CARROLLTON POLICE CHIEF TO RETIRE

Chief David James has recently announced his retirement effective Jan. 15, 2010, after more than 15 years of service. During his tenure, the Carrollton Police Department adopted an operational philosophy with community resolution-oriented policing, implemented through self-directed work teams and servant-leadership.

James has more than 36 years experience in municipal law enforcement service, executive management experience with other municipal services and working with city management. Prior to his appointment in Carrollton, James retired from the Dallas Police Department after 21 years of service. Best wishes to Chief James.

FRISCO ANNOUNCES PARTNERSHIP FOR EMERGENCY RESPONSE

City of Frisco officials and Frisco ISD are working together to create a new state-of-the-art emergency response system to allow police and fire officials much more access to information throughout the city.

The new Situational Awareness for Emergency Response system (SAFER) will integrate multiple databases, software programs, and computer platforms. The new system will link security cameras at schools with the police and allow still photos and floor plans of city and school sites to be displayed so firefighters and other emergency responders can better respond if interiors are smoke-filled or security cameras are not operable.

KUDOS TO PLANO ISD STUDENT FINALISTS IN GEOGRAPHY POSTER CONTEST

Girish Muthumula, 3rd grader at Barksdale Elementary School in Plano, was recently named 1st place winner in a statewide geography poster contest sponsored by the Texas Alliance for Geographic Education at Texas State University. The theme of the poster contest was "Europe Beyond Borders: Exploring the Physical & Cultural Landscape."

Finalists in four age categories (K-2nd Grade, 3rd-5th Grade, 6th-8th Grade, 9th-12th Grade) were named this month, and the first place winners in each categories, along with their teachers, were honored this week at the State Capitol. Parents, school and district

administrators, state legislators, and representatives from state education agencies participated in the awards ceremony, hosted by Dr. Richard Boehm, Co-coordinator of the Texas Alliance for Geographic Education. Girish and his family, and teacher, Anisha Patel, were among first place winners from school districts across the state, such as Clear Creek, Comal, Kerrville, Fredericksburg, San Marcos, South Texas and New Braunfels ISDs.

COPPELL DANCE STUDENT TO PERFORM IN MACY'S PARADE

Congratulations to Ballet Academy of Texas student Abby Lett, who has been selected to perform at the 83rd Annual Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City.

Abby will join 68 fellow performers - ages 10 to 18 and representing 22 states and three countries - as part of Stagedoor Manor Performing Arts Training Center, in a first ever singing/dancing finale for the parade. Abby has attended classes at Stagedoor, a total immersion summer theater program located in upstate New York for the past five years.

Abby is a sophomore in dance at Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts. She also dances at Ballet Academy of Texas in Coppel under the direction of Lisa Slagle.

The Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade is attended by more than 3.5 million people on the streets of New York City and viewed by more than 40 million watching on NBC.

FLORENCE'S FOCUS

DPS DATABASE HELP KEEP TEXANS SAFE

The Department of Public Safety maintains a database containing criminal history information reported by all of Texas' 254 counties. This information is the foundation of our background check system, and is used by a variety of entities both public and private to protect Texans against criminal offenders. It is used by school districts to screen educators and administrators who will interact so closely with our children. It is used by parents to check the criminal record of a potential childcare provider. It is used by anyone and everyone conducting a background check on another person in the State of Texas. So, it is critical to our public safety that this information be accurate and complete. However, for many years now, Texas counties have struggled with the complete and accurate reporting of criminal history information to DPS, and unfortunately, many of our counties continue to struggle.

This problem is of great concern to me, which is why I authored legislation last session intended to help counties begin to improve the completeness of their reports to the Department of Public Safety. The bill encourages counties to improve their reporting by requiring those counties whose reporting percentage is less than 90% to get together and establish a local data advisory board. This board is composed of local officials like clerks of courts, attorneys, sheriffs and other actors who deal with this information on a daily basis. The board is required to come up with and implement a data improvement plan to be submitted to DPS by June 1, 2010, which DPS will then publish on its website to allow residents to monitor their county's progress.

The reasons for these inadequacies vary greatly from county to county, but I have always believed in local control, so it was my goal to find a solution that would allow those who understand the problem best, the locals, to find a workable solution to improve county reporting. But whatever the reason, it is imperative that the information reported to DPS be complete and accurate, because too many Texans rely on this information when making decisions that affect their health, well-being and safety for us to allow it to continue to be incorrect.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

STATE POSTS UNCLAIMED PROPERTY FOR THE TAKING

State law requires the Texas Comptroller's office to hold abandoned and unclaimed property reported by businesses and financial institutions until its owners or their legal heirs claim it. The agency attempts to find the rightful owners of unclaimed properties through annual newspaper advertising, direct mail notices and the agency's Web site. Last year, a record \$147 million was returned to its rightful owners. This year, the list is available online. To see if you have unclaimed property waiting for you, log on to www.claimitexas.org.

DRIVERS LICENSE RENEWAL NOW ONLINE

In order to reduce wait times at local driver's license application and renewal offices, the Texas Department of Public Safety has announced they will no longer handle license reinstatements in person. Drivers needing to reinstate a suspended or revoked license must submit the documentation either online or through the U.S. Postal Service.

Additionally, the DPS Driver's License office at Dallas City Hall will no longer issue original driver's licenses or identification cards, or process out-of-state transfers. Customers needing to renew or replace their licenses or i.d. cards can still visit this location, however, you must visit another DPS office for other services. Log on to www.txdps.state.tx.us to find the location nearest you.

STIMULUS WATCH

The Mercatus Center at George Mason University new website has launched to help the administration keep its pledge to invest stimulus money smartly, and to hold public officials to account for the taxpayer money they spend. Log onto <http://stimuluswatch.org> to track stimulus spending in your neighborhood. You can search for contracts and grants awards by state and city, by awarding agency, or by recipient. You can also vote on whether you are satisfied with funding for particular projects or not, and join in online conversations about the awards.

###

If you do not wish to receive Direct from Shapiro, please reply to this email with "REMOVE" in the subject line. Thank you!