

## **Editorial: Shapiro offers best tuition approach**

REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION OF THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS

05:44 PM CDT on Wednesday, April 1, 2009

Sen. Juan Hinojosa surely spoke for many Texas families when he told an overflow crowd yesterday in Austin that college costs are the primary complaint he hears from his South Texas constituents. Indeed, this very day, families across the state are waiting to see what legislators do about tuition rates before deciding where to send their high school graduates next fall.

The personal nature of college costs explains the packed hearing by the Texas Senate Higher Education Committee. Prices shot up after the 2003 Legislature let campuses set their own rates. Increases have been less dramatic lately, but that hasn't quelled a populist revolt against the universities. The bills heard yesterday respond to that outcry.

Hinojosa, a McAllen Democrat, offered the most worrisome proposal. He would limit a college's annual tuition increase to the rate of inflation.

Again, that clearly taps into the anti-increase fervor, but Texas Tech University Chancellor Kent Hance offered a persuasive rejoinder. In his West Texas drawl, Hance reminded senators that Texas could become a third-world state if it so limited college tuition but provided no extra state funding.

A remedy like that, if you can call it one, would severely crimp a university's ability to control class sizes, attract leading instructors and develop top labs. Such items cost money, and they are among the features that students, families and reviewers look for when rating a school.

Given the two compelling sides of this debate, we remain convinced that Sen. Florence Shapiro, a Plano Republican, has the best approach. She would let schools increase their rates each year but allow freshmen to keep the same tuition rate through four years of college.

Her proposal, which mirrors what schools in Illinois and Georgia use, seems like a classic win-win. Schools retain flexibility; students (and their families) gain predictability. By embracing it, legislators could ease minds on both sides.

© 2009, *The Dallas Morning News, Inc. All Rights Reserved.*