

# How Will Texas Schools Spell 'Relief?' *Prioritizing Enforcement*

By Ben Antillon

reprinted from *The Canadian Record, Canadian, Texas*

On February 24, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick unveiled the Texas Senate Taxpayer Relief Act, which would provide property and franchise tax relief to homeowners and businesses. "At the end of the day," the press release said, "the Texas economy stays strong if people have more money in their pocket and if businesses have more money to create jobs."

But what will happen when public schools have less money in their pockets due to lower property taxes, which had already been cut in 2010? Will that affect the Texas economy?

Patrick's press release came a couple of days after Gov. Abbott informed the state that the 2013 Texas High School graduation rate exceeded the national average. The National Center for Education Statistics, which is part of the United States Department of Education, released a report detailing state-by-state graduation rates in 2012-13, which showed that Texas had a graduation rate of 88 percent, surpassing the national average

of 81 percent.

While Texas might be outperforming the rest of the country in terms of the high school graduation rate—which depends on standards set by the state—the state lags behind in public school spending per student, average SAT scores and college degree attainment.

According to a public education finances report by the U.S. Census Bureau, in the fiscal year of 2012, Texas spent \$8,261 per pupil in public education—while the rest of the country spent \$11,094 per student on average—ranking the state 44th in per student spending nationwide. With public education spending this low already, one can only wonder what will happen if Lt. Gov. Patrick and his fellow Republicans do succeed in reducing property taxes even more. Even without the bill, one should not forget that tax collections will likely be affected by low gas prices and production.

Currently, Texas ranks 46th in the country on the college readiness SAT exam with a composite score of 1437, which is behind the national average of 1498. Similarly the state's population has one of the lowest college degree attainment rates in the country. As of 2010, only 32.2 percent of Texans had a college degree compared to an average of 39.3 percent in the rest of the country, ranking

Texas 43rd.

"I am pleased to support one of the largest and most significant tax relief packages in the history of Texas," said Patrick. "These reforms will provide immediate and lasting economic relief to both homeowners and businesses."

While the "immediate and lasting" economic effects of the tax relief act are debatable at best, school budgets will be hit hard and immediately if there is no meaningful reform made to the current funding system.

The unimpressive tax relief act proposed by Patrick and other Republican Senators is nothing but a race to the bottom, and the symptoms of the phenomena are most clearly seen in Texas public schools. Much more impressive—and probably better for the immediate and lasting economy of the state—would be for legislators to unveil a plan to make Texas public education the best in the country, instead of handicapping it further.

## Kern Receives Settlement From Castro County

According to the March 4, 2015, edition of the Castro County News, former Castro County employee Elaine Kern of Nazareth (who had been employed in the County Tax Assessor's office in the Courthouse) has received a monetary settlement of \$28,750. This resolved a case filed in August 2014 by Kern against the county concerning a charge of workplace discrimination.

The settlement was reached on January 20, 2015, and the CC News filed an open records request to get the information. The vote on the settlement should have been voted on in Open Session of the Commissioners' Court.

Kern, who had worked in the Tax-Assessor's office under Pamala Rickert, then and current Tax A-C, ran against Rickert in 2013. Kern ran in the Republican primary while Rickert, the incumbent, ran in the Democratic primary. Rickert was re-elected in the General Election.

Kern reportedly alleged a hostile workplace and cited harassment, which allegedly forced her out of the office.

In the settlement, Kern agreed not to sue the County regarding her complaint filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and Texas Workforce Commission. She also withdrew the charge of discrimination filed against the county.

The County Newspaper is seeking to determine if the funds were paid from the County's general fund or if insurance proceeds were used.

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President Obama's decision to defer the deportation of up to 5 million undocumented immigrants has proven to be a controversial one. At this point, the executive action—which would have permitted law-abiding immigrants who pay a fee and have no criminal record to come out of the shadows—has been placed on hold as a lawsuit filed by 26 states works its way through the judicial system.

Opponents of the proposal have argued that Obama overreached his powers. But the fact is that there are more than 11 million undocumented immigrants in the country today, and Congress only appropriates the federal government enough resources to deport an estimated 400,000 people per year, raising this unavoidable question: Shouldn't those already over-

taxed resources be reserved for deporting criminals who present a real danger to society, instead?

When it comes to law enforcement, one would not question a sheriff's decision to prioritize serious offenses like a bank robbery over minor ones like a speeding car. Just imagine the reaction most would have to a police officer pausing to make a traffic stop on his way to a violent crime in progress.

This is an example of prosecutorial discretion and it makes perfect sense. If there are limited resources—as is the case with the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency—it is the government's responsibility to use those resources wisely.

If the federal government had the capability to deport all 11.7 million undocumented immigrants, prosecutorial discretion would be out of the question and Obama's actions would arguably be unconstitutional. But no such capability exists.

Someone has to decide who gets deported, and who does not. President Obama simply believes deporting criminals should be given priority over splitting up families and sending students back to a country that many of them do not even remember.

This is not the first time a president has provided discretionary relief from deportation to undocumented immigrants. The long history of executive actions in immigration includes actions taken by both Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. In 1990, Bush Sr.'s actions deferred the deportation of an estimated 1.5 million immigrants who had immediate family residing legally in

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Periodicals postage paid at Hart, Texas 79043. Publication No. 025-016.

Mailing address to which undeliverable copies or change of address notices are to be sent to:

The Pulse  
P.O. Box 350  
Hart, Texas 79043

Failure of the subscriber to notify change of address will result in corresponding loss of subscription time.

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## Weather

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U.S. Weather Observer

	Hi	Lo	Pr
Thursday	62	38	.07
Friday	65	39	
Saturday	58	37	.09
Sunday	61	34	
Monday	79	33	
Tuesday	82	36	

March 2015.....	0.22
2015.....	1.20
2014.....	0.19