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Senators Duncan and Shapiro file bill to assist emerging research universities

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AUSTIN - Sens. Robert Duncan and Florence Shapiro have filed legislation to strengthen Texas' competitive edge.

With Senate Bill 1560 and a Constitutional amendment, SJR 35, the senators intend to invigorate the state's universities that are on the precipice of achieving national research status, as described by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

"Texas is a wonderfully diverse state, rich in unrealized talent," said Senator Duncan. "It will be to our own detriment that we neglect the potential for greatness among us."

Senator Shapiro said the bill maps out a pathway for the state's seven emerging research universities to attain new success.

"Texas has always been a leader in so many ways in higher education," Senator Shapiro said. "But, California boasts nine Tier One research universities, and New York has seven. Texas has two public - UT and A&M, and one private - Rice University. But Texas also has seven emerging research universities who deserve an opportunity to reach Tier One status, and this bill maps out a pathway for them to get there."

The National Research University Fund will be funded through money that has been invested in the Higher Education Fund. The HEF was first funded in 1995 with an annual \$50 million appropriation from the Legislature. The goal was for the fund to reach \$2 billion, at which time the interest generated would replace the general revenue appropriation to the state's 27 non-Permanent University Fund universities. Subsequent budget cycles stalled the annual appropriation; the current value of the fund is slightly less than \$500 million.

Senators Duncan and Shapiro seek to rededicate that fund to the NRUF and distribute the future earnings of the fund to those universities that attain the "emerging research university" status and meet criteria established with this legislation.

To qualify for funds from the NRUF, an emerging research university must expend at least \$45 million in restricted research funds; possess a total endowment of at least \$500 million, and satisfy rigorous academic standards. These criteria are based on

recommendations of the THECB, which utilized recognized authorities on higher education measurement standards, the Association of American Universities and the Center for Measuring University Performance.

Senator Duncan said the appeal of this criteria is that it may be measured in clear, objective standards.

“This legislation is designed to encourage our universities to challenge themselves for excellence. Once they reach these objective standards, they may join the Fund and continue to develop,” he said.

Currently, seven universities are within three-to-five years of attaining the criteria for the NRUF: the University of Texas - Arlington, University of Texas - Dallas; University of Texas - El Paso, University of Texas - San Antonio, University of Houston, University of North Texas, and Texas Tech University.

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