

TEXAS PENSIONS

Nichols: There's No Spring Break for Legislators

March 17, 2019, By Robert Nichols, Contributing Writer

March is always a busy month in the Capitol as many people make their way to Austin during spring break. We enjoy seeing everyone, but there is no spring break for legislators as committee agendas are full of potential legislation.

Teacher Retirement System. Everything is bigger in Texas and that includes the state's Teacher Retirement System, one of the 13th largest pension funds in the world, providing retirement benefits to more than 420,000 people.

[Lufkin Daily News](#)

Our View: Time Is Overdue for Lawmakers to Stabilize TRS

March 18, 2019, By AGN Media Editorial Board

Sen. Joan Huffman (R-Houston) and Rep. Greg Bonnen (R-Friendswood) each have filed bills aimed at putting a little money in the pockets of retired teachers and bulking up the financial strength of the Teacher Retirement System of Texas.

Huffman's Senate Bill 12 would gradually increase contributions on the part of the state, school districts and active employees, and Bonnen's House Bill 9 gradually increases the state's contribution to retired teacher pensions. Huffman's proposal would give all retired teachers an additional payment in an equal amount to their current monthly pension check or up to \$500, our story last week reported.

[Austin American-Statesman](#)

Supplemental Funding Legislation Draws From 'Rainy Day Fund'

March 20, 2019, By Ed Sterling, Texas Press Association

A few of the funding priorities expressed by the executive, legislative and judicial branches are not covered in Senate Bill 2, the state's tentatively approved appropriations bill for fiscal years 2020 and 2021. Authored by Senate Finance Committee Chair Jane Nelson, R-Flower Mound, the legislation proposes the following allocations:

- \$542 million to address pension liabilities for the Teacher Retirement System and provide retired teachers a "13th check" up to \$500;
- \$211 million to pay obligations of the Texas Tomorrow Fund, a college tuition savings program;

[Bay City Tribune](#)

TEXAS ECONOMIC INDICATORS

Senate Unanimously Approves Supplemental Spending

March 17, 2019, By Orange Leader

The Senate approved Wednesday \$8.4 billion in additional spending, \$6.1 billion of it in state funds, to cover extra costs incurred over the last two years. This happens every session, as budgets are written prospectively based on projections of costs and revenue, and actual income and expenses have to be reconciled with the estimates. What's unusual about this session's supplemental budget bill is that Texas experienced the most costly storm in U.S. history during the interim, and the Senate proposal would spend billions to pay for damage, relief and recovery efforts for Hurricane Harvey. In order to pay for that, among other costs, the bill would use \$4.4 billion from the state's Economic Stabilization Fund. "Now I realize those are big numbers," said bill author and Finance Committee Chair Senator Jane Nelson of Flower Mound. "But \$3 billion of this package is due to Harvey, which we knew was going to have a significant price tag."

[Orange Leader](#)

Oil Prices Hit New 2019 Highs on OPEC Output Cuts, US Sanctions

March 19, 2019, By Tom DiChristopher

Oil prices struck new 2019 highs on Tuesday, supported by supply cuts led by producer club OPEC.

U.S. sanctions against oil producers Iran and Venezuela are also boosting prices, although traders said the market may be capped by rising American output.

Brent crude oil futures were up 20 cents at \$67.74 per barrel around 7:20 a.m. ET (1320 GMT). The international benchmark for oil prices rose to its highest level since Nov. 16 earlier in the session.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate futures were at \$59.49 per barrel, up 40 cents from their last settlement. WTI also hit an intraday peak going back to Nov. 12.

[CNBC](#)

Texas Lawmakers Debate Need for State Incentives Programs

March 20, 2019, By Bob Sechler

The merits of taxpayer-funded business incentives -- described alternatively as either crucial tools for economic development or wasteful corporate giveaways -- took center stage Wednesday as a Texas House committee heard debate over key tax abatement programs used by local governments and school districts.

"I would much prefer that we didn't need (tax) incentives, but we don't live in an ivory tower," Dale Craymer, president of the Texas Taxpayers and Research Association, said during a hearing over House Bill 2438, which would reauthorize the two types of tax abatements through 2032.

[Austin American-Statesman](#)

NATIONAL PENSION, INVESTMENTS & LEGAL

'No Good Options': Kentucky Lawmakers' Vote Hurts Pensions

March 13, 2019, By Adam Beam

Kentucky owes roughly 35,000 state workers more than \$15 billion in pension benefits over the next three decades, but it has a little more than \$2 billion to make those payments — making it one of the worst-funded public pension plans in the country.

The legislation would let about 118 quasi-governmental entities, which includes public health departments, domestic violence shelters and public universities, leave the struggling pension system while paying less than what they owe. Senate budget chairman Chris McDaniel, a Republican, said he expects all of them to take the deal. If they do, the 10,850 employees employed by those agencies — except those who work for universities — would have their benefits frozen.

[AP News](#)

Public Pensions and Social Trust

March 17, 2019, By Elizabeth Bauer

So it seems that I hit the one-year mark of my writing on retirement at this platform, and have still not managed to address some of the topics I wanted to discuss, in particular, questions of what pensions look like abroad and what we can learn from them. But right now I find myself thinking about international comparisons in another way, around the question of social trust.

Round about a year ago, Megan McArdle, formerly a Bloomberg columnist and now writing at the Washington Post, wrote a series of articles coming out of a visit to Denmark. Her first, at Bloomberg (paywalled), expresses the gist of the article in its title, "You Can't Have Denmark Without Danes; What a small, happy country can teach a huge and fractious one. And what it can't." Fundamentally, Denmark can do what it does and function as well as it does because of its considerable degree of social cohesion; a sense of cohesion that, to her understanding, was not the result of an expansive welfare state but a precondition for its success.

[Forbes](#)

CalPERS Wants to Double Down on Private Equity Bets

March 18, 2019, By Heather Gillers

A new strategy to invest more deeply in private equity is roiling the nation's largest public pension fund.

Three of 13 directors who oversee the California Public Employees' Retirement System raised questions last month about the transparency and scope of a proposed venture that would divert as much as \$20 billion over the next decade to new investments in technology startups and privately held businesses.

[Financial News](#)

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