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Leaders touting Proposition 4 to aid 'emerging universities' in Texas

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BY GENE TRAINOR
gtrainor@star-telegram.com

University, business and political leaders are traveling the state to generate support for ballot Proposition 4, the state constitutional amendment that could open a floodgate of cash to seven Texas universities seeking to become major research institutions.

Voters will be asked Nov. 3 to shift the \$500 million in the largely unused Permanent Higher Education Fund to what would be called the National Research University Fund.

"Emerging universities" — a state designation that includes the University of North Texas in Denton, the University of Texas at Arlington and the University of Texas at Dallas — would compete for the money. Also in the race would be the University of Houston, the University of Texas at San Antonio, the University of Texas at El Paso and Texas Tech University in Lubbock.

Passage of the ballot proposition could eventually result in thousands of new jobs, perhaps millions of new dollars and all sorts of new technology, supporters say.

"I think it sends a signal to the rest of the country that we're serious about research," said Texas Tech Chancellor Kent Hance, who visited the *Star-Telegram* recently to discuss Proposition 4.

But opposition has emerged. The Young Conservatives of Texas say the money would be better spent rewarding top teachers and providing scholarships to students. Too many college classes are taught by graduate students working as teaching assistants, while full professors spend time on research, said Tony McDonald, the group's vice chairman of legislative affairs.

"We don't need more research," he said. "We need more of a focus on actual learning and education. There needs to be a focus on teaching."

What it means

If the amendment is approved, before the seven universities could dip into the National Research University Fund, they would have to achieve five of seven requirements. Those include a \$400 million endowment, qualified research expenditures of \$45 million a year and a high-achieving freshman class, as defined by the state Higher Education Coordinating Board.

As they achieve goals, money would be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis.

The goal is to help the universities achieve Tier One, or top research, status. Typically, that means

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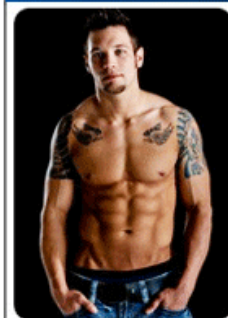
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spending more than \$100 million a year on research, offering doctoral degrees in at least 50 academic areas, doing well in national rankings, and being a member of the Association of American Universities, the club for the 62 leading research institutions in the United States and Canada.

Currently, Texas, with a population of 24.3 million, has two public Tier One institutions — the University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M University in College Station — and one that is private, Rice University in Houston. In comparison, New York, population 19.5 million, has seven; California, population 36.8 million, has nine.

The potential benefit from more Tier One schools in Texas could be immense, proponents say.

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