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# NORMAN: Tier 1 legislation makes amazing progress in Texas Legislature

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The people pushing for more top-level research universities in Texas — including the president of UT-Arlington, UT-Dallas and the University of North Texas — have made a lot of headway in Austin. The Legislature convened in January.

The coming week should provide some clear signs about how successful they have been. Don't get away with enough money to push their institutions to Tier 1 immediately, but they stand every

Signs are good that, when this session ends, they will at least have a structure in place that will last in future years.

The first big step will probably happen Monday in the Senate, where a resolution by Sen. Robert Duncan is expected to come up for floor debate. It's crucial, because it sets the foundation for an ongoing effort by universities across the state.

Texas has three universities with Tier 1 status: UT-Austin, Texas A&M University in College Station and Rice in Houston. California has nine Tier 1 universities; New York has seven.

The second big event for the week will be Wednesday at a hearing before the Senate Higher Education Committee Chairwoman Sen. Judith Zaffirini, D-Laredo, and Duncan have submitted bills to specify how to fund research at universities that are working to build on their research capabilities.

This is costly business. The research is usually funded by grants from sources such as the National Science Foundation, the Department of Defense and private industry. But the researchers cost a lot of money.

Recruiting those scientists is a worldwide competition. It can cost \$20 million or more to persuade a research team and grant-funded work to a university. The reward is world-class science, as well as top graduate and undergraduate students. There's often economic growth in the surrounding communities from fuel commercial ventures.

Just look at UT-Austin and A&M-College Station, each of which accounts for more than \$400 million a year. They are the state's biggest magnets for top college freshmen and for venture capital that flows from the research.

Texas has seven institutions classified by the Higher Education Coordinating Board as "emerging." They include the UT institutions in Arlington, Dallas, El Paso and San Antonio, as well as UNT, Texas Tech and Rice in Houston. They all want to be Tier 1, "first choice" universities for high school graduates, not run by Rice.

The legislation coming up this week does not get their unanimous support. In particular, Duncan's bill, which would require some university presidents consider too high. But the goal all along has been to require institutions to raise private funds, particularly in raising private funds, before getting assistance from the state.

Duncan's bill would send added state research funding only to those institutions that have built more. UT-Arlington and UNT fall far short of that, at less than \$100 million each.

Meanwhile, Texas Tech, Duncan's hometown university and his alma mater, is far ahead with \$300 million. Nobody wants to accuse the senator of favoritism, but it's safe to say that there are more administrators at other universities.

It's rare to see a legislative effort as big as this one reach all of its goals in one session. If the session will have made very significant progress. There is plenty of time left to do more before the session ends.