

FROM THE OFFICE OF
STATE REPRESENTATIVE RUTH JONES MCCLENDON

For Immediate Release

Wednesday, May 30, 2007

Contact: Janis Reinken, Chief of Staff
(512) 463-0708



**McClendon, Truitt & Kolkhorst Team Up to Ensure
13th Check for Retired Teachers & School Workers**

(San Antonio) -- A trio of State Representatives, Ruth Jones McClendon (District 120, D-San Antonio), Lois W. Kolkhorst (District 13, R-Brenham), and Vicki Truitt (District 98, R-Southlake), beat the odds in the final weekend of the 80th Legislative Session by holding their ground to make sure that a much-needed benefit increase passed for TRS retirees. Retired teachers, counselors, cafeteria workers, custodial staff and other school personnel have not received any increase in retirement benefits in 6 years because the Teacher Retirement System Fund (TRS) has been unable to provide one. McClendon said, "There is no doubt in my mind that this victory for our retirees would not have been possible without the persistence, determination and dedication of Chairman Truitt [House Pensions & Investments

Committee] and Representative Kolkhorst. They were by my side each step of the way as we kept telling each other, 'Keep your eyes on the prize!'"

The bill will now proceed to the Governor for signing. The House voted Sunday, the next to last day of the Session, to accept the report of the S.B.1846 Legislative Conference Committee, on which McClendon served as a member. "Thanks to the hard work and leadership of Representative Ruth Jones McClendon, retired educators will receive their first benefit increase in over 6 years," said Tim Lee, Executive Director of the Texas Retired Teachers Association. "Texas retired public school employees are living on pensions that are current from the year 2001, and in 2007, everything is costing more. This was a 'must do' Session for these life-long public servants, and Representative McClendon got it done for retired teachers," Lee concluded.

The final result of S.B.1846 will be to provide a "thirteenth check" for eligible teacher retirees, in an amount equal to the regular monthly payment payable in August 2007, or the amount of \$2400, whichever is less. The contribution by the state to the TRS fund will increase to 6.58%, and the contribution by active teachers may increase slightly, but only if necessary to assure soundness of the retirement system. The contribution by active teachers to the Teacher Retirement System has been a steady 6.4% for over a decade, while the state's contribution level remained at the constitutional minimum of 6%. The dual objectives of increasing the state's contribution have been to provide for actuarial soundness of the fund, and allow for a one-time supplemental benefit this year.

Those who keep watch of the intrigue between House and Senate Bills have observed the tug of war between McClendon's original proposal, H.B.1105, and S.B.1846 proposed by Senator Duncan. McClendon's first proposal would have enabled the supplemental monthly payment for eligible retirees to be equal to the amount they would receive in August, 2007, and it would have provided for a cost of living adjustment to retirees' benefits. H.B.1105 would have increased the state contribution level to 6.7% (of the aggregate annual compensation for all members of the TRS) for that specific purpose, and it passed the House 140 – 0 in April. Then it moved to the Senate where it was assigned to the State Affairs Committee, chaired by Senator Robert Duncan (District 28, R-Lubbock). H.B.1105 was never scheduled for a hearing before the Senate committee, however. Senator Duncan proposed his own teacher retirement benefits structure as Senate Bill 1846.

By amending S.B.1846 and revising it in Conference Committee, Representative McClendon said, "The House has held firm that Texas must provide its retired teachers with a much-needed increase, and treat active teachers equitably in regard to the state's contribution level to the fund." In addition, she emphasized, "In Conference Committee, we were able to accomplish a reasonable compromise, so that Texas retired teachers will still receive a 'thirteenth check' this year, and the state will increase its contribution to the TRS fund, which it has needed to do for the past ten years. The cost of living increase, as desirable as it is, and as much as I wanted to see it become a reality, will need to wait for the next Legislative Session."

Representative McClendon serves on the House Committees on Appropriations, and Pensions & Investments (on which she holds a seniority appointment and serves as Chief Budget Officer). Additionally, she is Chair of the House Committee on Rules & Resolutions. She also serves on the Sunset Advisory Commission, which oversees all agencies under the auspices of the State of Texas. Representative McClendon invites constituents with comments on legislative issues, or who may have ideas for legislation, to contact her at the Capitol office at 512-463-0708 or District Office, 210-225-2107. The District and Capitol offices will remain open during the interim between the 80th and 81st Legislative Sessions.

~ 30 ~