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Supporters see jobs from Prop 4

By [Melissa Ludwig](#) - Express-News

If San Antonio wants to turn its blue collar white, building a Tier One research university is a good place to start.

That was the message from local business leaders, lawmakers and education officials gathered at DPT Laboratories on Tuesday to urge support for Proposition 4, a constitutional amendment that would boost the national research stature of Texas' seven emerging research institutions, including the University of Texas at San Antonio.

The amendment, which is on the Nov. 3 ballot, would create a National Research University Fund with \$500 million now resting in a dormant higher education fund, and allow the seven universities to compete for the money.

“What we need is jobs that will make a difference ... that will raise the median income in San Antonio,” said Duane Wilson, president of the North San Antonio Chamber of Commerce.

A national research university could do that by drawing top faculty and students to San Antonio, which in turn attracts companies with white collar jobs to fill, city leaders said.

“What's troubling ... is that I don't even hear about us being on the short list for those jobs,” said Mayor Julián Castro at a UTSA alumni luncheon last week.

Tier One status “would set us on a pedestal, one that we have never been on before,” said Richard Perez, president of the Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce.

The chamber co-hosted the press conference with Texans for Tier One, a group formed to campaign for Proposition 4. A study by economist Ray Perryman for Texans for Tier One found that if two of the seven universities reached their goal of becoming Tier One by 2035, it would add 344,393 permanent jobs and increase annual economic output by nearly \$82 billion.

But Tony McDonald, vice chairman of legislative affairs for the Young Conservatives of Texas, which opposes the amendment, said business and education leaders are overselling the benefits.

“I highly doubt this is going to improve business in the state,” McDonald said. Approval of Proposition 4 would not turn any of the seven universities into Tier One overnight.

The fund sets a high bar for doling out the money — universities must spend \$45 million per year on

federal research, and meet five of seven benchmarks that include a \$400 million endowment and 200 Ph.D. graduates per year.

It will likely be 2013 before any of the universities qualify for the money, supporters have said.

But the bill's author, state Rep. Dan Branch, R-Dallas, said the fund would spark immediate interest in Texas from around the nation, and spur donations from private donors eager to see their local university reach Tier One.

“In this business, perception is reality and the word is already getting out that Texas is taking this seriously,” Branch said. “That momentum feeds on itself.”

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