

UTSA@50

Celebrating the First 50 Years of
The University of Texas at San Antonio



A black and white photograph showing three men in suits. The man on the left is seen in profile, speaking into a large, vintage-style microphone. The man in the center is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The man on the right is partially visible, wearing glasses and looking towards the center. The background is slightly blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting with trees.

**The Origins of UTSA
1955-1969**



Ceremony at the Alamo to Sign Legislation Creating the University of Texas at San Antonio, June 6, 1969.
San Antonio Light Photograph Collection, UTSA Archives.

On June 6, 1969

Governor Preston Smith and a bevy of state and local officials ascended the steps of a stage in front of the Alamo. It was the twenty-fifth anniversary of D-Day, and the stage was appropriately decked out in patriotic bunting. The Governor, though, was in town to celebrate a very different historical event: the founding of San Antonio's first public university. A crowd of several hundred people listened to Smith's celebratory remarks and then watched as he playfully called State Representative Frank Lombardino, who had sponsored the House bill establishing UTSA, to the microphone for the official signing ceremony. Lombardino turned around, and Smith signed the law on his back.

Similar ceremonies occurred across Texas, although no other state legislator apparently offered his back as a desk. With the creation of several branch campuses, the University of Texas System would now offer many thousands of Texans opportunities for a better life. Few people in the audience that day, though, knew how arduous the campaign to expand access to higher

education had been. An impressive array of local and state businessmen and politicians had worked for many years to blend sometimes competing ideas into an acceptable solution to the state's higher education needs. Without that effort, UTSA would never have been born.

That struggle began inauspiciously in the mid-1950s. As in most states across the nation, thousands of Texas veterans of World War II and the Korean War were using their G.I. benefits to pursue a college education, causing a rapid rise in enrollments that strained the resources of the state's colleges and universities. J.O. Loftin, president of San Antonio College, was one of several junior college officials who sought additional funding from the 1955 legislative session to deal with his burgeoning student enrollments. They received a hostile reception in Austin, where they listened to lectures from legislators irritated by the prospect of funding increasing enrollments. Representative Pearce Johnson, for example, accused President Loftin of padding his enrollments with military personnel for the sake of unjustifiably increasing his budget. Johnson's comments reflected



Governor Preston Smith signing the Legislation on State Representative Frank Lombardino's back, June 6, 1969. Express-News Photograph Collection, UTSA Archives.

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the beliefs of deeply conservative politicians who dominated state government. Texas, in their opinion, had become prosperous by relying on oil and cattle, neither of which required a college degree. It therefore followed that higher education was an extravagance that taxpayers should not subsidize. To discourage enrollment growth at a time when the demand for a college education was rapidly expanding, the legislators insisted on limiting state contributions by doubling tuition.

Loftin and his successors would find a more sympathetic audience for their concerns at home. In the late 1950s the Chamber of Commerce was engaged in a broad program to promote economic development, including a medical school, commercial development along the Riverwalk, and HemisFair. The Chamber also had some interest in promoting manufacturing, especially high tech industries such as aircraft manufacturing and

chemical plants. Since those industries required skilled workers, which were in short supply in the city, some Chamber members became very interested in creating local opportunities for advanced training in science and engineering. The challenge, though, was how to obtain that kind of training.

Local colleges were not well-equipped to solve that challenge. The degree programs at the city's private colleges bore little relationship to what the Chamber wanted. In an effort to accommodate the Chamber's higher education ambitions, however, the presidents of St. Mary's University and Trinity University announced plans to expand their new degree programs in business, science, and engineering. Trinity, for example, announced it would offer master's and doctoral programs in those fields. None of the private colleges, though, planned to increase their enrollments to deal with rising demand, and their high tuition costs made them inaccessible to most local residents.

That left SAC as the best choice for most San Antonians who wanted to pursue any sort of training beyond high school, and their interest in SAC transformed it into the city's largest college (with an enrollment of 6900) in 1960. SAC, though, was a two-year institution and its programs were not designed to offer the kinds of advanced training that the Chamber wanted and other colleges planned to offer.

Wayland Moody, SAC's president, offered a solution to this dilemma by proposing that SAC should become a four-year university. That seemed an eminently sensible idea at the time. By 1960 the legislature had approved the conversion of several of Texas' junior colleges into four year institutions; the idea also made economic sense because SAC already had a new physical plant that would not need massive amounts of cash to upgrade or expand. The Chamber found Moody's proposal so appealing that it convinced state representative Franklin Spears to introduce a bill in the 1961 legislative session to authorize SAC's conversion into a four-year university – with the proviso that the new institution would specialize in scientific and engineering training. Unfortunately, Spears' bill foundered on the requirement that the Commission on Higher Education had to review such proposals, and the Commissioners did not complete their analysis until the summer of 1963.

While the Commission procrastinated, the Texas political landscape underwent a seismic change regarding higher education when John Connally won the race for Governor in November, 1962. Connally belonged to a faction within the Texas Democratic Party that included Senator Lyndon Baines Johnson, House Speaker Sam Rayburn, and Governor Price Daniel. In the mid-1950s they had wrested control of the state's Democratic Party from then Governor Alan Shivers. While not exactly "liberals," they were relatively less conservative in their approach to public issues than Shivers Democrats, creating an opportunity for some progress on issues such as higher education.

Connally exemplified that selectively progressive perspective, particularly on economic development issues. As Secretary of the Navy in John F.

Kennedy's presidency, Connally had learned a great deal about the distribution of naval contracts to states with major universities that could contribute to the scientific and engineering needs of an evolving military-industrial complex. He had been simultaneously impressed by the effects of federal largesse on those states and depressed by his own state's mediocre ability to participate in that bounty.

Convinced that Texas needed to compete more effectively in the nation's rapidly emerging high tech economy, Connally focused on higher education reform in his campaign for Governor. He assembled an able team of men who would be extremely important to fulfilling that campaign promise: Austin lawyer Frank Erwin (a future chairman of the University of Texas' Board of Regents); Lloyd Bentsen (a future U.S. Senator); Ben Barnes (a future Lt. Governor), and John Peace (also a future chairman of the Regents and the only San Antonian in the group).

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When the legislature convened in January, 1963, Connally faced serious opposition to his plans for higher education from more conservative Democrats. They immediately maneuvered to block his plans by proposing a constitutional amendment that would require a two-thirds vote in both houses of the legislature plus passage of a state-wide referendum before any new university could be created. Although that maneuver failed to pass, diehard conservatives showed their determination to oppose Connally's attempt to promote economic development by expanding the number and size of Texas' universities.

In such a toxic political environment, the idea of converting SAC to a four-year institution faced

serious obstacles. President Moody withdrew his request, but Representative Spears, perhaps to keep the idea alive, began advocating for an entirely new four-year public university for San Antonio – which was the first time anyone had suggested such a possibility.

The prospects for Spears' startling idea depended, though, on Connally's ability to outmaneuver his opponents; to do so he asked Spears to sponsor legislation to create the Committee on Higher Education Beyond the High School. The Committee would study the state's educational needs and make recommendations for changes to him. In order to ensure that those recommendations would be economical and efficient – goals that would placate opponents of reform – Connally also asked the Committee to recommend replacing the Commission on Higher Education with a Coordinating Board for Higher Education that would oversee, and control, expansion of the state's university systems.

Connally also maneuvered to enhance his Committee's credibility by appointing San Antonian H.B. Zachry as its chairman in March, 1963. Zachry was the city's most successful businessman, and his very conservative views would appeal to Democrats who opposed Connally's ideas. He was a strong advocate for San Antonio's private colleges; in his first public remarks about his new assignment he stressed the need for economy in the use of public funds in developing any additional state universities. He also supported the Chamber of Commerce's plan to increase local opportunities for high tech training.

Up to this point the battle over higher education had been an intramural fight among conservative Democrats until 1963, with liberal Democrats watching from the bleachers, but that was about to change. Local liberals had become more organized and politically significant during and after the 1960 Presidential elections, when they had been active supporters of John F. Kennedy. Albert Pena had emerged as a major liberal leader with his election as a County Commissioner. He strongly opposed the Good Government League, which dominated San Antonio's politics, and his faction fought a bitter, but losing, battle with John Peace for control of the Bexar County delegation to the Democratic national convention in 1964. Liberal Democrats, though,

would increase their influence through the late 1960s as the civil right revolution galvanized Mexican-Americans' support for Pena and his faction.

Not surprisingly, liberal Democrats had their own ideas about local educational reform. In February, 1964, State Representative Jake Johnson announced that he would introduce legislation in 1965 to create a new university for San Antonio that would focus on Latin American affairs and languages. Moreover, he said it would be located at HemisFair, which was under construction at the time. Johnson's proposal sought to undermine the plans of the Good Government League, in partnership with the business community, for economic development. It ignored the educational priorities of the businessmen working to attract high tech manufacturing to town, and it threatened the tourism industry's plans to use several of the Fair's buildings to significantly enhance the city's convention business.

H.B. Zachry tried to arrange peace between San Antonio's political factions. When his Committee presented its report on improving the state's higher education system to Governor Connally in August, 1964, it included a recommendation that San Antonio should receive state support to create a two-year technical training school. In October Zachry met with Representative Johnson and other members of the city's legislative delegation to offer a compromise. In exchange for liberal support for a two-year technical school, he, as Chairman of the Board for HemisFair, would support locating it on the fair grounds.

Representative Johnson, on behalf of his colleagues, rejected Zachry's offer. Then the liberals won a majority of legislative races in November, placing themselves in control of any legislation affecting higher education in San Antonio. Governor Connally, perhaps concerned this political bickering threatened the city's ability to participate in his educational reform efforts, announced at the opening of the 1965 legislative session that he supported a four-year public university that would focus on science and technology for the city.

Connally's first priority, though, was to win legislative approval for his higher education

Coordinating Board. He needed a state agency that could make recommendations to the legislature based on an independent study of Texas' higher education needs to help neutralize the intense opposition of conservative Democrats. Of course, he would use his appointive powers to ensure that the new Board's members would favor his own opinions on that issue, but there were no guarantees that they would automatically fall in line. Perhaps as a hint of what the Board ought to do, Franklin Spears steered a resolution through the House that endorsed Connally's idea for a new university in San Antonio for the next legislative session.

Despite Connally's success in winning approval for the new Board, he would need additional help overcoming conservative opposition to an expensive expansion of higher education. A combination of sheer luck and a shift in political momentum would supply most of that help. The luck came in the form of economic prosperity. Oil profits grew spectacularly in the mid-sixties, increasing state revenues and enriching the Permanent University Fund. With more money available there was more opportunity to fund Connally's program. Increases in the PUF, which was a major source of funds for the University of Texas at Austin and Texas A & M, gave the UT Board of Regents a lot more money to pursue their ongoing campaign to transform UT into a major research university.

Both economic developments helped create political momentum for reform. Connally had appointed Frank Erwin to the UT Regents in 1963, and Erwin would become a major political power among the Regents in advancing his friend's agenda. Erwin was a lawyer with a great many connections among Texas businessmen, who admired his blunt style and devotion to UT. He was not initially favorably disposed to a new university in San Antonio because of that devotion, but he would soon change his mind as a result of an odd problem that Earl Rudder, President of Texas A & M, had.

A & M had a branch campus in Arlington, Texas, that had grown larger than the College Station campus. Rudder became concerned that the Arlington campus would overshadow the main campus, especially when Cecil Green, Eugene

McDermott, and Eric Jonsson, the founders of Texas Instruments in Dallas, asked him to create advanced degrees in sciences and technology at Arlington. They had earlier established the Southwest Center for Advanced Studies in Dallas to train some of their workers, but they now wanted to expand opportunities for graduate degrees in the metroplex. Rudder refused their request, which infuriated them. As founders of one of Texas' most successful technology companies, they commanded very considerable political clout, which they used in an effort to change Rudder's mind. Caught between their wrath and his concern about Arlington's potential to overshadow College Station, Rudder escaped his dilemma by offering the Arlington campus to the UT Regents as a branch campus in 1965. The legislature approved the transfer (which did not, after all, require any new state funding). Erwin, who became chairman of the Regents in 1966, apparently found political inspiration in that transfer. He wanted to increase public support for transforming UT into a nationally prominent university, and Green, McDermott, and Jonsson's ardent lobbying for graduate degrees in science and technology probably inspired him to think creatively about how to win broader support for his plans for UT.

Erwin therefore devised a plan to distribute branch campuses around the state, which dramatically increased political support for Connally's reform program as legislators eager to claim credit for bringing benefits to their constituents lent Erwin their support.

The Texas Instruments executives made one other contribution to the growing political alliance backing Connally. Ben Barnes had become House Speaker in 1963, and would later be elected Lieutenant Governor. Green, McDermott, and Jonsson launched a campaign to transform Barnes into a strong advocate for science and engineering training by arranging tours for him at M.I.T. and other academic institutions and businesses along Boston's famous Route 128 technology belt. Already a member of Connally's inner circle, Barnes developed a broad knowledge of the significance of high tech industry to economic development as a result of their efforts. That in turn would give him more influence with legislators who might

be hesitant to support the expansion of higher education.

All of this political activity undermined the long partnership that had worked to create high tech education in San Antonio. In January, 1966, St. Mary's University's president had announced plans to construct ten new buildings, including a center for mathematics and engineering; Trinity was planning a new life sciences building. Both institutions were therefore working hard to fulfill their commitments to the business community to provide graduate training. Connally's support for a new four-year, inexpensive public university focusing on high tech education was not a welcome idea to the city's private colleges who feared that this proposal would create unfair competition to their programs. Nor was it exactly what the Chamber had in mind.

Frank Lombardino joined that battle in the 1966 legislative elections, running successfully on his pledge to bring a four-year university to town. His election demonstrated how popular the idea of a new university had already become, and it also added an energetic personality dedicated to a single issue to the delegation.

Thus, Jesse Fletcher, who chaired the Chamber's Education Committee and was President of SAC, wrote the Coordinating Board to recommend that it establish a new, two-year college that would be separate from SAC and would offer advanced course work leading to bachelor's degrees to students who had completed their Associate's Degree. He did not say that this new college would offer high tech education, perhaps in an attempt to protect St. Mary's and Trinity University's plans.

Fletcher's proposal found little favor at the Coordinating Board, and in the meantime the leadership for educational reform had changed in the Chamber of Commerce. Since the early 1950s the Chamber had always appointed a college president to chair its Education Committee, but in June, 1966, Herbert Kelleher became chair instead. This was rather surprising since Kelleher had only recently arrived in San Antonio and had little if any

experience with the now long local campaign for education reform. He was, however, a lawyer who happened to work in John Peace's law firm, and he had worked in Connally's re-election campaign. In effect, Connally's local supporters were attempting to exert some control over the increasingly bitter dispute between liberals and conservatives over a university for San Antonio. Connally would help cement that effort by appointing Peace to the UT Board of Regents in 1967, making him the crucial arbitrator between those factions' competing visions for a university.

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Lombardino wasted no time introducing his bill authorizing a university in the 1967 legislative session, but the Coordinating Board stymied his efforts. It agreed that San Antonio could "probably" support such an institution, but it also declared that its staff had not yet completed work on a master plan for higher education – which would not be ready until the 1969 session.

Unable to fulfill his campaign pledge, Lombardino turned his attention to the issue of a location for the university, reviving HemisFair as the site. That precipitated a very long controversy that eventually threatened to fracture the fragile political unity that was essential to obtaining legislative approval for a public university.

Lombardino unintentionally launched that controversy when he asked the City Council in October, 1967, to endorse HemisFair as the future site for a university. At the time, the UT Regents had not yet provided any guidelines regarding how much land a new university would require. The Health Science Center was the only precedent San Antonians had for estimating what a university might require, and the Regents had demanded 600 acres for that. Since HemisFair contained only 142 acres, Lombardino's request implied that the entire

site, at a minimum, would have to be transferred to the Regents. Councilwoman Lila Cockrell opposed the idea, noting that the city had made legal commitments to state and federal agencies for using HemisFair's buildings after the Fair closed that would limit the amount of space for a university. The Council decided to refer Lombardino's request to its HemisFair Reuse Committee, which, ironically, endorsed his idea on the grounds that it would save a great deal of money by eliminating the need for a separate campus.

That eminently conservative rationale produced considerable chaos. During the reign of the Good Government League (from 1954 to 1974), businessmen and politicians agreed that promoting economic development was the sole purpose of government (aside from keeping taxes as low as possible). Although those two groups may have been private disagreements about specific policies, in public only harmony and unity prevailed. The Reuse Committee's endorsement of Lombardino's proposal for HemisFair, though, placed the City Council in the awkward position of possibly endorsing an idea that jeopardized the interests of the Chamber of Commerce and its most important business group – the Hotel Owners' Association.

It did not help matters that the Reuse Committee's recommendation delighted the Downtowners' Association. Retail shopping had been slowly shifting away from the downtown since the Great Depression, spurred on by suburbanization and the construction in the early 1960's of Wonderland, North Star and Central Park malls along Loop 410. Downtown retailers were desperately trying to revive their fortunes, but as retail shopping declined, tourism had inexorably grown to dominate space in the center of the city. Hoping to reverse that trend, the Downtowners' Association's members quickly became strident supporters of Lombardino's idea because it might create a large, new source of customers for their stores.

The Hotel Owners' Association's members were not amused by this proposal because it might well mean the loss of the HemisFair Convention Center, which was crucial to their hope for increasing the importance of tourism in San Antonio. With hotel

owners vocally opposed to the Downtowners' support for locating the new university at HemisFair, the Chamber of Commerce became hopelessly divided, threatening its harmonious relations with the City Council. City Manager Jerry Henckel sought to reconcile the now bickering business factions by recommending that the Council dedicate the southern part of HemisFair to a university (which amounted to 32 acres) while reserving the northern section for tourism. The Regents, probably through John Peace, informed the city that such an offer was inadequate, prompting a sort of free-for-all of offers for more adequate sites. The County Commissioners, dominated by liberals, called a meeting with the legislative delegation in December to discuss possible sites, which resulted in suggestions ranging from Camp Bullis on the far north side to Brooks Air Force Base on the south side. Martin Goland, president of Southwest Research Institute, offered 200 acres on the west side close to SWRI. Mayor Walter McAllister weighed in with a comment that the Regents should buy 1,000 acres on the "fringe" of the city, although he did not identify a specific site.

This debate came to a head just as the 1969 legislative session began. Unwilling to surrender to the Hotel Owners, the Downtowners worked with Lombardino to write HemisFair into the enabling legislation as the site for a university. That prompted the Hotel Owners to hold a referendum of their members that unanimously rejected that idea. Having failed to adjudicate the dispute between the two groups, the Chamber polled all of its members, who also voted to reject HemisFair.

With the community at loggerheads over the site question, the Regents sent a delegation to town that toured HemisFair, pronounced its size inadequate, and told local leaders that further controversy over the site issue would end San Antonio's chances for a university. Regental intervention silenced the fight over a location and essentially undermined Lombardino's desire to designate a site for a university in his draft of the enabling legislation. The warring sides temporarily suspended hostilities for the duration of the legislative session

Although Connally had declined to run for re-election for Governor, several of his key allies were

well-placed to continue the battle for the expansion of higher education in the 1969 legislative session. Preston Smith had succeeded Connally; Gus Mutscher had become Speaker of the House; Ben Barnes had won election as Lieutenant Governor; and John Peace and Frank Erwin were Regents. Furthermore, Erwin had obtained formal approval from the Regents for an historic expansion of the UT System. His proposal included graduate programs for Arlington; conversion of Texas Instruments' Southwest Center for Advance Studies into UT-Dalls; a four year public university for San Antonio; and similar branch campuses distributed across the state to attract support for a broad array of legislators. Erwin also worked with Speaker Mutscher and Lt. Governor Barnes to arrange for smooth sailing for the Regents' plan.

Erwin's careful preparations produced relatively quick approval for that plan in the House, where legislators eagerly sponsored and co-sponsored specific laws authorizing branch campuses for the UT System. Lombardino, for example, had no problem attracting 87 co-sponsors for his own bill within a week of filing it. By mid-March the House had voted for Erwin's entire plan. The Senate, however, proved a far more difficult challenge. Six Senators, led by W. T. Moore of Bryan, organized to stop Erwin's juggernaut dead in its tracks. As chair of the powerful State Affairs Committee, Moore used his authority to create a subcommittee composed of himself and two other adamant opponents of expansion to review the House bills. He then offered public reassurances that his subcommittee was hard at work while privately slowing the review process enough to jeopardize the entire package. Lt. Governor Barnes tried to encourage more speed, but Moore finally announced in mid-May that he was flatly opposed to the creation of any new universities.

Given the Senate's normal procedures for considering legislation, Moore's announcement should have meant the death of Erwin's plan, especially since Moore had managed to delay the review process to the point that very little time remained before the close of the legislative session. At this point Lieutenant Governor Barnes imposed a deadline on Moore's subcommittee and threatened

to transfer the entire package to another committee if Moore did not comply. Moore responded to that threat by launching a filibuster, with the support of Senator Charles Herring of Austin. Barnes, in a display of raw political power, held the Senate in session continuously until an exhausted Moore yielded the floor. Having removed Moore as the last remaining obstacle, Barnes sent the legislation to a new committee that quickly reported favorably, clearing the way for passage of Erwin's plan on May 28.

San Antonio, previously the largest city in the state without a public university, had now acquired the opportunity to educate far more of its citizens than had ever been possible before 1969.

Connally's educational reformers had won an historic victory. Erwin's plan proposed the largest expansion of higher education in the state's history. The system of branch campuses would eventually enable tens of thousands of Texans, who would otherwise not have had the opportunity, to earn a college degree. San Antonio, previously the largest city in the state without a public university, had now acquired the opportunity to educate far more of its citizens than had ever been possible before 1969.

There were, however, several new issues to ponder: what kind of university would it be? whom would it serve? and where would it be located? Answers to those questions would fundamentally affect not only the new university but also the community it sought to serve.