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ATPE Weighs In on State of the State

AUSTIN, Texas — Texas Governor Greg Abbott addressed some key public education issues in his State of the State address today. The state's largest educator group, the Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE), offered its reaction to the priorities outlined by the governor. While ATPE appreciates the governor's interest in solving some problems facing Texas, the organization also has a few concerns with Abbott's stated goals, which included enabling private school vouchers and limiting payroll deduction for teachers.

The governor acknowledged that the state must address its school finance problems, and ATPE agrees. "We agree that adequately and equitably funding public education should be one of our state's highest priorities," said ATPE Executive Director Gary Godsey. Unfortunately, the governor continues to push for private school vouchers at the same time.

"Public schools have the responsibility of educating every child," Godsey said. "Operating within our current budgetary constraints, we simply cannot afford to overhaul our school finance system and simultaneously fund a costly voucher experiment to benefit unaccountable private and home schools."

ATPE also appreciates the governor's continued commitment to early childhood education and high standards for educators. ATPE believes that even the small number of teachers who've been allowed to stay in our public schools despite a history of inappropriate conduct with students is unacceptable. Godsey added, "ATPE will continue to do our part to help the state recruit, train, and retain high-quality teachers who uphold the educators' code of ethics."

One of the governor's legislative goals shared during today's address, an attack on payroll deduction, drew objections from ATPE. Gov. Abbott praised two bills to prevent educators from using payroll deductions for their association dues.

"Unfortunately, the governor has joined a chorus of lawmakers misleading the public into believing their taxpayer dollars are being spent to collect so-called union dues, when nothing could be further from the truth," said Godsey. "This legislation has nothing to do with taxpayer funds."

ATPE, which has no union affiliation, explains that existing laws ensure there are no taxpayer costs incurred when educators deduct their voluntary association dues at the same time as other deductions from their paychecks. But Senate Bill 13 and House Bill 510 would bar educators from using payroll deduction for dues paid to ATPE, while allowing other public employees to continue to use payroll deduction for union dues.

"These lawmakers aren't targeting unions, they're targeting teachers for being advocates for their public schools," said Godsey. "If Gov. Abbott and the legislature are truly concerned about the role of government, they should reconsider this priority and let school employees worry about how they spend their own money while the legislature focuses on how to spend the state's money."

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The Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE) has been a strong voice for Texas educators since 1980. It is the leading educators' association in Texas with more than 100,000 members statewide. With its strong collaborative philosophy, ATPE speaks for classroom teachers, administrators, future, retired and para-educators and works to create better opportunities for 5 million public schoolchildren. ATPE is the ally and the voice of Texas public education.