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State Sen. José Rodríguez to receive award at statewide conference of bilingual educators

El Paso - State Sen. José Rodríguez will receive the *Dr. Joe J. Bernal Community Advocate Award* on Thursday as part of a statewide gathering of more than 1,000 teachers, school administrators, and bilingual-education professionals.

The 2015 Texas Association for Bilingual Education (TABE) conference began today in El Paso and runs through Saturday (Oct. 17, 2015). The award to be presented to Sen. Rodríguez is named for Dr. Joe J. Bernal, a former Texas legislator, educator, social worker, and a renowned Mexican-American civil rights activist.

"I'm honored to be recognized by TABE," Rodríguez said. "The work of this group and the educators they represent are crucial for the future of Texas."

In the 84th Legislative Session in 2015, Sen. Rodríguez successfully sponsored a bill (HB 218) that allowed school districts with dual language programs to maintain and expand their programs, and filed SB 161, which would have increased funding for English Language Learner programs.

TABE Conference Chair, Dr. Josie Villamil Tinajero, an education professor at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) and the former dean of UTEP's College of Education, said that being bilingual gives young people more opportunities. "It is an asset and an intellectual accomplishment. Bilingual education should be seen as a national treasure. This conference gives our community a great opportunity to showcase the groundbreaking work that takes place every day in El Paso's classrooms," she said.

At least 100 of the TABE conference's participants are members of BESO — the Bilingual Education Student Organization, the majority of whom are undergraduates preparing to be bilingual educators. The conference's full agenda and program are available at www.tabe.org.

For more information about this conference, members of the media may contact Dr. Tinajero directly at (915) 204-3499. Sen. Rodríguez will receive the *Dr. Joe J. Bernal Community Advocate Award* at 11 a.m., Thursday (Oct. 15, 2015) at the Abraham Chávez Theater, 1 Civic Center Plaza, El Paso, Texas 79901.

José Rodríguez represents Texas Senate District 29, which includes the counties of El Paso, Hudspeth, Culberson, Jeff Davis, and Presidio. He represents both urban and rural constituencies, and more than 350 miles of the Texas-Mexico border. Senator Rodríguez currently serves as the Chairman of the Senate Hispanic Caucus, and is a member of the Senate Committees on Education; Health and Human Services; Veteran Affairs and Military Installations; Nominations; and Agriculture, Water, and Rural Affairs.