

ANGIE CHEN BUTTON



The State of Texas House of Representatives

March 27, 2009

Dear Friend:

This week the first bills of the 81st Legislative session made it to the House Floor. Nine bills were passed. To view these bills or the status of any legislation you are interested in, please visit <http://www.legis.state.tx.us/>.

Senior Citizens

The Appropriations committee addressed another important issue this week. The committee discussed the Program of All-inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) program. The PACE program maximizes independence by providing comprehensive health care that is responsive to the needs of the individual rather than to the constraints of the funding agency. It emphasizes helping older people remain at home as long as medically, socially, and economically feasible. Medicare, Medicaid, and the individual each pay a monthly "premium" based on the individual's entitlement. The average per capita rate is lower than traditional long-term care costs.

Education

Our public schools and teachers are vital to the future of our great state. The appropriations committee has heard testimony from TEA Commissioner Robert Scott. Commissioner Scott testified that the stimulus funds must not be used to create ongoing financial obligations for the state or its school districts. In an attempt to identify items that stimulus funds could be used for without creating any additional burden, textbooks were identified. Another factor that must be considered is, as a result of market conditions, there is a shortfall in the Permanent School Fund (PSF) that is used to purchase instructional materials. Using "stimulus" funding to purchase instructional materials will help meet this shortfall and will help the state retain revenue from the "Rainy Day" Fund which might otherwise have to be diverted to meet these most fundamental obligations.

This week the committee continued the discussion on the Teacher Retirement System (TRS). TRS is working closely with the Texas Legislature to explore options that can best protect the long-term stability of the Trust Fund and preserve the current benefit structure for TRS Trust participants. This afternoon, the Appropriations committee adopted a rider to issue of a 13th check averaging \$1000 per recipient to retirees much like the one that was distributed after the 80th legislative session. This is seen as a temporary bridge to a more long-term approach to addressing the needs of the Trust Fund and retirees.

Economic Development

An issue of great importance to our economy is the development of a trained workforce. In order to attract jobs of the future, we need to be able to provide a workforce with the necessary skills to fill the positions. HB 2169, which I joint authored with Norma Chavez, was heard before the Technology, Eco. D., and Workforce committee this week. HB 2169 addresses this issue by developing an additional job incentive program allowing the Texas Workforce Commission to use an existing program, the skills development fund, to commit training funds to prospective new employers. This program will create an advantage for economic growth in luring new businesses to Texas.

As you may have already heard, Texas A&M was awarded with \$50 million from the Emerging Technology fund. The dollars were originally earmarked for the Texas Enterprise Fund, a deal closing fund used to recruit businesses to Texas. The funds were transferred to the Emerging Technology Fund so the grant would not deplete the account. The Emerging Technology fund is a fund used to bring the best scientists and researchers to Texas, attract high-tech jobs, and help start-up companies get off the ground faster. Technically, there was no actual violation of the law but legislators believe these actions were not in line with the legislative intent of these funds. The appropriations committee is thoroughly examining the matter.

The Emerging Technology Fund and the Texas Enterprise Fund have historically been successfully used to bring technology and jobs to our great state. It is important that these accounts remain intact but it is also important that these funds are used in the manner intended. I assure you that I, along with my colleagues, will closely monitor the situation and all future awards.

Public Health

This week I laid out HB 1530 before the Agriculture Committee. HB 1530 moves health-related pesticide applicator licensure from the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) to the Texas Department of Agriculture. This move will improve the efficiency of mosquito spraying and lessen the burden on municipalities who struggle to pay exorbitant fees under the current DSHS program. The number of licenses health-related pesticide applicators will likely increase while at the same time the total cost to cities will decrease. Representatives from the City of Richardson and the City of Garland appeared before the committee to testify about how this legislation would help the municipalities and their residents. The bill was unanimously voted out of the committee and should be heard on the House floor soon.

Capitol Visits



Rep. Angie Chen Button with representatives from the City of Garland that made the trip to Austin to show their support for HB 1530



Rep. Button and Constituents from the Texas Association of Contractors Left-Right Eric Etheridge Cedrich Montgomery Mike Geach and Travis Todd



Rep. Button introducing Pastor Jerry Nichols on the House Floor

On Thursday, I had my first honorary page of the day at the capitol Zachary Bullard. Zach came with me to the House Floor Wednesday, and was able to witness the legislative process first hand. Zachary provided valuable insight into legislation affecting education in Texas. My staff and I enjoyed visiting with Zach and his mother Donna Bullard, and grandmother Jean Mullins. The honorary page program is a wonderful program for young people from my district to be able to experience first hand their state House. If you have a child who would like to participate in the honorary page program please contact my office.

It is a great pleasure to serve you in the Texas Legislature. Please contact me with any questions or concerns you may have.

Sincerely,

Angie Chen Button

If you would like to be added or removed from this mailing, please e-mail District112.Button@house.state.tx.us.