

ANGIE CHEN BUTTON



The State of Texas
House of Representatives

May 1, 2009

Dear Friend:

I am so pleased to be able to share this process with you and to help keep you informed about what is taking place at your capitol. Please feel free to share this newsletter with any family, friends, or coworkers that may have an interest. Additionally, if there is a topic that you would like more information on that is not covered in this newsletter, please let me know.

Appraisal Reform

This week, the House passed a series of property tax reform legislation. I proudly co-authored several of these bills. Portions of this reform package will be sent to the voters so you can make the final decision on how the process should work.

HB 3612 is the first of these reforms. This bill changes the appeals process taxpayers must go through when appealing an appraisal. Currently a taxpayer must appeal an appraisal review board (ARB) decision to district court. Many cases that are currently appealed are complicated and require extensive knowledge of property tax and real estate law and it can turn into a time-consuming and expensive process for the taxpayer. This bill creates a pilot program in Dallas county and various other counties in the state that will reform the process by allowing the taxpayer to appeal to the State Office of Administrative Hearings.

The second piece of legislation passed was HB 3611. The quality and qualifications of ARB members vary around the state. Although current law requires ARB members to complete a training course authorized by the Comptroller of Public Accounts and several courses on open meetings requirements, there is no requirement for ARB members to be knowledgeable about real estate or property taxation prior to their service on the board. This bill allows the board of directors in two or more adjoining appraisal districts to consolidate through interlocal contract. By permitting consolidation, a greater pool of talent will be available.

The third piece of legislation that passed that is of particular importance to District 112 is HB 3613. In many areas of the state, homes are being valued based on what the land could be used for, rather than what it is currently being used for. The standard used by appraisal districts in these scenarios is called "highest and best use." It is a generally accepted standard to use the "highest and best use" of the property to arrive at fair market value. HB 3613 eliminates the practice by requiring the market value of a residential homestead to be determined based on its value as a residence homestead regardless of if it is the highest and best use of the property. This bill further ensures that homeowners are allowed to keep their homes, despite commercial development going on around them.

Public Education

On Wednesday, the House unanimously passed HB 3, the school accountability bill. HB 3 will make Texas the first state in the nation to include postsecondary readiness as a central piece of the public school accountability system by requiring schools to increase the percentage of students meeting postsecondary standards.

I believe this important piece of legislation will move us away from a one-size fits all education by easing the pressure of high-stakes testing. This testing has failed to provide an accurate picture of student achievement. By requiring a more holistic view of a child's performance, I, along with my colleagues in the House, feel public education will take a big step forward.

This bill requires students on the recommended plan to complete 4 years of English, math social studies, science, 2 years of a foreign language, and 8 electives of their and their parent's choice. This bill maintains the requirement that school districts offer a foundation and enrichment curriculum such as physical education and fine arts.

Our goals are to elevate Texas to rise among the top ten states in preparing students for postsecondary success and to close the current achievement gap. With the help of every parent, PTA member, and school official in both RISD and GISD that communicated their needs and concerns with me, we moved closer to achieving these goals.

H1N1 Flu (Formerly Known as Swine Flu)

The H1N1 Flu has dominated the headlines as of late. The following situation report was provided by the State of Texas, State Operations Center (SOC) and was current as of 7:00pm Thursday.

SUBJECT: H1N1 Flu

CURRENT SITUATION: Due to the health emergency that exists in the State of Texas, the Governor of Texas has issued a disaster proclamation for the entire State.

As of April 30 2009, the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) has confirmed 26 cases of (H1N1 Influenza) and an additional 10 suspected cases that are awaiting confirmation. Governor Perry requested the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and provided 812,570 courses of antiviral medications from the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS). This plus the initial request for 37,430 courses, brings the total number of courses to 850,000 courses available in Texas as a precautionary measure to prevent the spread of H1N1 Flu.

As a result of recent H1N1 cases, some schools and districts have closed as a precautionary measure. A complete listing of school closings can be found at www.tea.state.tx.us.

Department of State Health Services: For general information use the Department of State Health Services website: www.dshs.state.tx.us/swineflu. For questions from the public or those who believe they have symptoms, call: 1-888-777-5320. For questions from Health Care Providers, call: 1-877-623-6274. A link is being provided for access to the H1N1 Flu Map: <http://maps.google.com/maps/ms?ie=UTF8&hl=en&t=p&msa=0&msid=106484775>

090296685271.0004681a37b713f6b5950&ll=32.639375,-10.390625&spn=26.890702,57.128906&z=5

DSHS opened the Regional Operations Center (ROC) on Saturday, April 25, 2009 in response to the current H1N1 Flu incident. DSHS San Antonio has activated the (ROC) to coordinate public health activities for the 28 counties which comprise the Regional Advisory Council (RAC) 8 area. ROC operations are being conducted from the region offices. The ROC is specifically coordinating with public health authorities, Regional Medical Operations Center (RMOC), Department of State Health Services Multi-Agency Coordination Center (MACC) and selected Office of Emergency Management (OEM) offices.

DSHS Harlingen has activated the DSHS ROC to coordinate public health activities for 19 counties. ROC operations are being conducted from the regional office. The ROC is specifically coordinating with public health authorities, DSHS MACC, County Health Departments and selected OEM offices. The ROC is being supported and assisted by UT Brownsville – School of Public Health and the DDC McAllen Regional Liaison Officer.

DSHS Houston has activated the DSHS ROC to coordinate public health activities for the 16 counties which comprise the RAC 6/5 area. ROC operations are being conducted from the region offices. The ROC is specifically coordinating with public health authorities, CMOC, DSHS MACC, and selected OEM offices. The ROC is being supported and assisted by Harris County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, and the DDC Houston Regional Liaison Officer.

The number of probable cases for H1N1 in the surveillance information update for Texas is 56.

The number of confirmed cases for H1N1 in the surveillance information update for Texas is 26.

Capitol Visits



Representative Button and Constituent Dr. Thomas Winkler

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.