

ANGIE CHEN BUTTON



The State of Texas
House of Representatives



May 13, 2011

Friends,

It has been a week of early mornings and late nights as the House worked hard to pass bills before yesterday's deadline. Thursday marked the 122nd day of the 82nd legislative session which is the last day the House can consider House bills on second reading on the Daily or Supplemental Calendar. The late nights will continue as we finish work on the budget, local bills, and Senate bills.

Last week I discussed the "Sanctuary Cities" bill. After a technical problem halted the vote last week, the bill was brought back up Monday and passed the House. It will soon be heard in the Senate. I am working hard here in Austin to pass legislation that will have a positive impact on the lives of Texans.

HB 2120 - Taking Care of Retired Teachers

I was proud to joint-author this bill that will allow the makeup of the board of trustees of the Teacher Retirement System (TRS) to better reflect its membership. This would allow one position that is currently held by an employee of an institution of higher education to instead be held by any TRS member or retired educator. It has passed the House and is on its way to the Senate for a hearing.

HB 2973 - Securing Freedom of Speech

Another great bill that has passed the House and is awaiting a hearing in the Senate is HB 2973. This legislation protects free speech by allowing a person to file a motion to dismiss if a lawsuit was based on that person's right to exercise free speech, petition, or association. Citizen participation benefits our community whether it comes in the form of petitioning the government, writing a news article or blog post, or commenting on the quality of a business. "SLAPP" suits, or Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation, are frivolous lawsuits aimed at silencing citizen participation. SLAPP suits stifle public debate because they cost money to defend, even if the person being sued was speaking the truth. These suits are particularly problematic for independent voices that are not part of a news or media company. SLAPP suits are becoming more common, in part because the Internet has created a searchable record of public participation. By allowing a motion to dismiss, HB 2973 allows the dismissal at the start of the proceeding, promoting the constitutional rights of citizens and helping to alleviate some of the burden on the court system.

HB 3025 - Making College More Affordable

This week the House passed HB 3025. This bill will make it significantly easier for college students to transfer between junior colleges and universities in Texas. HB 3025 creates a statewide transfer compact that includes a common course numbering system for core courses in major fields. Transfer students would receive credit from the receiving college or university for each course that the student had successfully completed at their previous school under this common course numbering system. This helps more students earn degrees and complete them faster by streamlining the transfer process at every level leading to more affordable options for higher education. HB 3025 will next be heard in the Senate Higher Education Committee before it can be voted on by the full Senate.

Richardson, Texas - International Business Capital of North Texas

Richardson will soon be known as the "International Business Capital of North Texas." With the adoption of HCR 130 today, the House of Representatives officially gave its nod to this designation. The city has the most international businesses per capita in North Texas and the second most in the entire state. Richardson is home to an impressive 36 international businesses and numerous other local businesses that operate globally. Countries doing business in Richardson include China, India, Germany, Israel, Japan, the United Kingdom, and Taiwan. These businesses represent a variety of industries such as telecommunications, technology, and transportation. With the formation of the Mayor's Office of International Business, Richardson will continue to attract and support international businesses and expand its international ties to create jobs for Texans. I was proud to carry this legislation in the House and look forward to its passage by Senator Carona in the Senate.

HB 804 - Enhancing Voter Integrity

This week the House passed HB 804 which creates a third-degree felony for illegal voting by a non-U.S. citizen. This bill would strengthen the election process by creating a criminal offense for a non-U.S. citizen who attempted or successfully committed voter fraud. The current law is too broad because prosecutors must prove that a person cast a ballot knowing that he or she was ineligible. The bill would provide clear language that would better enable officials to prosecute individuals who harm our democratic process. HB 804 will now go to the Senate for passage there.

HB 2449 - Securing Mail-in Ballot Integrity

Currently, a person commits an offense if the person knowingly possesses an official ballot belonging to another person (vote harvesting). Depending on the number of ballots illegally in their possession, the offender could be charged with a class B misdemeanor up to a state jail felony. HB 2449 is an important tool in combating voter fraud by mail. The House passed HB 2449 to third reading, and it will now go to the Senate for final passage.

HB 892 - Putting a Stop to Human Smuggling

HB 892 creates an offense for the unlawful transport of an illegal alien. A person commits an offense if the individual knowingly transports an illegal alien in a manner that is designed to conceal an unauthorized immigrant from local, state, or federal law enforcement. This offense will be a state jail felony. Human trafficking is a serious and growing problem in Texas. Women and children make up the overwhelming majority of human trafficking victims, and many get forced into prostitution or placed in other dangerous situations. This legislation will help bring to justice the coyotes who smuggle people across the border. HB 892 passed to engrossment and will now head to the Senate for passage.

SB 331 - K2: Marijuana 2.0

SB 331 establishes a new penalty group for K2 and other synthetic marijuana products. Depending on the quantity of K2 or other synthetic marijuana product possessed, the perpetrator could be charged anywhere from a class B misdemeanor to a second degree felony. K2 has already been banned in 16 other states and 55 local Texas jurisdictions. K2 and other forms of “herbal incense” are products that have been sprayed with a chemical compound that mimics the effects of THC, the active ingredient in marijuana. Smoking K2 can have dangerous health consequences, including hallucinations, severe agitation, elevated heart rate, elevated blood pressure, chest pains, black outs, tremors, seizures, and heart attacks. Now that the House has passed SB 331 to third reading, it will go to the Governor's desk for his signature.



Here I am on the House floor discussing legislation with Representatives Linda Harper Brown, Will Hartnett, and Burt Solomons.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to represent you in the Texas House. Please let me know if I can ever be of assistance.

Sincerely,

Angie Chen Button

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