STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Ernest Bailes

Serving House District 18:
Liberty, San Jacinto, and Walker Counties

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Dear Neighbors,

If I only had one word to describe the Texas House in May, I would say, "wow!"

Many House bills are into their third reading or have already passed the House, and are now being heard in the Senate.

Likewise, bills that passed the Senate are now being heard in the House. Some have cleared both chambers.

The budget is finally out of conference committee, and we are in the final days of full passage.

Our last day of the session is Memorial Day. While I would like to have been back in the District to honor those who have given their all, I look forward to paying tribute in Austin on May 27th.

By the time our next newsletter comes out, we will have wrapped up the 85th session. It has been my honor to serve HD 18 and the entire State of Texas.

God Bless You All and God Bless our Great

Ernest

Is it Magic, is it a Chameleon, or is it "Just Politics"?

Before bills move to the Governor to be signed into law, they must pass both the Senate and the House. The process is neither quick nor easy.

A bill that comes out of the House and goes to the Senate, or visa-versa, often makes a total transformation through amendments. Leaving many to ask if it is magic, is it a chameleon, or is it just politics?

Such is the case of HB 21 - the school finance bill which passed the House 132-15, back in April. Fast forward 1 month...

On May 22nd, during the middle of the night (or really early morning), the Senate approved their version of HB 21.

What began in the House as a good start to a much needed school finance reform, the Senate took HB 21 and transformed it into another attempt to get vouchers passed.

Through Senate amendments, HB 21 would allow parents of children with disabilities to use state money, in the form of vouchers (approximately $8100 per student) to leave the public school system. Parents would then need to seek out private schools or opt to homeschool.

The revised HB 21, which included the voucher-type program, also known as education savings accounts (ESA), was approved in the Senate 21-10.

This new version of HB 21 will now go back to the House to once again, be revised.

"As we wrap up the final week of session, we are reminded how complex the legislative process really can be. When we passed HB 21 in the House, we originally intended for it to reform a very complicated system of allocating money to public schools, as well as to provide a funding boost for most public schools. Now, it has taken on a whole new purpose. Soon, we will know how it plays out," said Representative Bailes.

HB 21, a bill that began as an effort to reform school funding, has undergone quite a transformation in the Senate this past week, leaving many to question the outcome.

The Blame Game

When it comes to political blame games, there are groups who are highly skilled at rewriting the narrative to fit their agenda.

There are also people who are easily influenced, and instead of taking time to find out the facts, they believe whatever they are told or read on social media.

While many of the issues these groups embrace are worthy, they have a hit and miss record of success. Instead of questioning why those carrying their legislation are often ineffective, they quickly transfer blame.

I can attest to that first hand. Two recent examples: I have been blamed for "Representative Bailes' Bad Budget," and accused of trying to kill Constitutional Carry. Both narratives, not fact.

As long as the blame game trumps everything else, important issues will fall prey, replaced with narratives totally void of relevant facts.

Instead of defending the false claims, I will stay focused on doing my job with honor and integrity. When the people of HD 18 elected me to represent them, they did so overwhelmingly. They didn't send me to Austin to make excuses. They sent me to be part of the solution, not the problem. They deserve better, and for that, I am thankful. eb4

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A Quick Glimpse... Legislative Update

SB 669: Protesting & Reforming Property Taxes

On May 21st, the House voted unanimously to further Texans' abilities and rights to protest their property appraisals. SB 669, which is co-sponsored by Rep. Bailes, will increase fairness to taxpayers by requiring local cities to announce a "no-new-revenue" tax rate every year and compare it to the tax rate they are actually proposing. This bill will hold taxing entities accountable to their constituents and will increase the transparency that is important to the taxpayers. "SB 669 will empower taxpayers by bringing greater transparency to the tax rate setting process and making it fair and accountable. This is not the final answer to this complex issue, but I look forward to working on this during the interim," said Rep. Bailes.

SB 312: TxDOT Sunset Bill

In order to promote government transparency and efficiency, each state agency in Texas goes through a legislative review, or Sunset Review, every 12 years to determine if that agency is still necessary. For the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), the Legislature believes they are necessary.

On May 17th, the House heard SB 312, which will keep TxDOT alive for the next 12 years. Representative Bailes supported the bill and looks forward to continuing to work with our 3 TxDOT HD 18 engineers on local, current, and future construction projects.

HB 435: Protection for Emergency Services Personnel

Currently, volunteer emergency services personnel, who carry handguns, may be required to remove their firearm before they can enter a certain location to perform their duties, which can result in an even more dangerous situation. Standing with our rural emergency services personnel in HD 18, Representative Bailes joint authored HB 435, a bill that will protect volunteer firefighters and EMS personnel by providing them with legal protections for carrying a handgun in an emergency situation. The bill is moving along in the legislative process and had a hearing on May 18th in the Senate Committee on State Affairs. Rep. Bailes looks forward to seeing the bill become law.

"Bathroom Bill" Amended to School Safety Bill

The Texas House of Representatives did not hear a stand-alone "Bathroom Bill." Instead, the issue was addressed as an amendment to a school safety bill, SB 2078.

The amendment to the bill says schools must provide single-occupancy bathrooms or similar facilities for students who do not wish to use the facilities commonly used by persons of their biological sex.

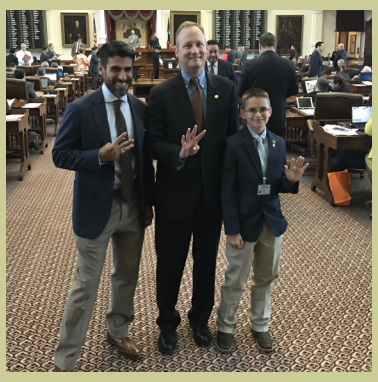
The bill, which passed 91-50, on Sunday, May 23rd, after hours and hours of debate, still needs approval from the Senate.

HB 1469: Charter School Teacher Qualification Passes

HB 1469 is a local bill to help teachers at Gulf Coast Trade Center in Walker County by allowing non-core vocational instructors to teach with a combination of extensive work experience with an alternative certification in lieu of a baccalaureate degree. Representative Bailes' bill was heard in the Senate Education Committee on May 11th. The bill was allowed to progress faster by suspending certain Senate rules, and it passed on May 19th. Senator Schwertner sponsored this bill in the Senate.

HB 2386: Outdoor Burning Progresses

HB 2386, relating to volunteer firefighter supervision of outdoor burning of wastes consisting of plant growth, was referred to the Senate Committee on Natural Resources & Economic Development and is now in the Senate's Content Calendars. Senator Nichols is sponsoring Representative Bailes' bill in the Senate.



Rep. Eddie Lucio, III, and Rep. Four Price, IV, took time to pose with Cinco Bailes, V, on the House Floor. Cinco thought it was pretty cool to pose as 3, 4, and 5.

HEARTS VETERANS MUSEUM
Huntsville, Texas

Memorial Day Program
Honoring Those Who Made the Ultimate Sacrifice
HEARTS Veteran's Museum
Veterans Conference Center, Huntsville, TX 77320
Monday, May 29, 7PM
Public Welcome—Free Admission

As we approach Memorial Day, we pause to reflect upon our many blessings and honor those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in military service for the United States. There will be many opportunities to pay tribute, one such opportunity will be at the HEARTS Veteran's Museum, Walker County.

It was a pleasure to welcome 8th grader, Cason Moorman, Walker Co., to his State House. Cason did an awesome job representing HD 18 as an Honorary Page for the Day.

Legislative Update, Continued

HB 424/SB 715: A Voice in Annexation Passes

Residents in HD 18 understand the time to deal with municipal annexation issues is before the problem occurs. In a proactive move, to protect future interests of his constituents in HD 18, Representative Bailes joint-authored HB 424.

On Sunday, May 22nd, the Texas House took up Senate Bill 715 to address the issue. (SB 715 was the companion to House Bill 424, which Representative Bailes joint-authored.)

Supporters of the bill say it protects those that do not want to join a city. Opponents argue that cities need the additional tax base to grow. Rep. Bailes believes residents in areas under consideration for annexation should have a voice in the process.

After a long, four hour debate, the House Chamber passed SB 715, 110-35, where it will now be sent to conference committee to be reconciled with the Senate version before being sent to the Governor's desk. If signed, this bill would take effect September 1, 2017.

Representative Bailes noted, "residents that choose to live outside the city should have the right to vote on whether or not they are annexed." This bill limits cities greater than 500,000 the ability to annex outside their jurisdiction without resident approval.

"The City of Houston continues to grow and expand towards HD 18, so it is imperative that we have a voice in the annexation process," said Rep. Bailes.

HB 2567: Forest Pest Control Passes

HB 2567, by Representative Bailes, relating to forest pest control, was heard in the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Water, and Rural Affairs on May 15th. The bill was heard and unanimously voted out the same day and passed May 19th. Senator Nichols sponsored this bill in the Senate.

SB 1329: Judicial Omnibus Bill

In February, Representative Bailes filed HB 2184, a bill to make changes to the Walker County Court at Law.

As the state's population grows in some areas and declines in others, judicial needs change throughout the various regions of the state. Representative Bailes had worked with the Court at Law in Walker County and understood the importance of getting the bill through the legislative process.

Instead of pushing this bill alone, he included this bill in the Judicial Omnibus bill of the session, SB 1329 by Senator Joan Huffman.

The bill was passed in the House on May 18th. SB 1329 addressed the same issues Representative Bailes was addressing in HB 2184, along with making positive changes to other courts all over Texas.

"As long as you keep a seat at the table, you are able to do good things for your district. I was glad to see language from HB 2184 successfully integrated into SB 1329," said Representative Bailes.

SB 1: A Balanced Budget

On May 20th, the Texas House and Senate have finally compromised on a budget that will fund the State of Texas for the next two years.

House Appropriations Chairman Dr. John Zerwas and Senate Finance Chairwoman Senator Jane Nelson, after more than a month in conference committee to hash out the budget differences, have come to a consensus.

The next budget is a balanced, fiscally responsible budget that will use $1 billion from the Rainy Day Fund (savings account) to help fund priorities such as mental health facilities, bulletproof vests for police officers, and CPS reforms.

A last minute request by Governor Abbott includes more funding for luring businesses and jobs to Texas. The final budget still needs to be approved by the Governor, and he may decide to line-item veto any funds he considers unnecessary. Stay tuned for an update in June.

Congratulations to all the 2017 high school graduates in HD 18. As you establish your place in life, be it in the military, workforce, college, trade school, or another path, work hard and do well. Each of you have talents, use them to make a difference in the world. Blessings to you all, we are proud of you!
(Photo credit Alpha Omega Academy, Walker Co., Graduating Class of 2017.)

Thank you Shepherd ISD (San Jacinto Co.) for your support of vocational programs that allow students to prepare for future careers. Also, a big thanks to the Health Center of Southeast Texas and Walgreens for their generosity in providing supplies for the Certified Nursing Assistant Pro-

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STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Porter Hewitt
District 18 Austin Intern

Porter is a recent transfer student to the University of Texas at Austin after earning her Associates degree with honors at College of DuPage in Illinois.

She is currently studying International Relations and Global Studies with minors in French and Middle Eastern Studies. She is a devoted member of the Model United Nations (MUN) at UT, where she helps run MUN conferences for high school students and has acted as a delegate in Charlotte, NC; Chicago, IL; and San Francisco, CA.

Following her graduation, Porter hopes to earn a Master's in Global Policy and Sustainability Management. In her free time, she likes to spend her time hiking at the Greenbelt, practicing yoga, and reading.

Owning your Choices and your Vote

This past week, the House heard SB 8, a bill that was very personal for me. In fact, I was 1 of 5 Representatives who joint-authored the pro-life legislation.

While there were many other pro-life bills filed this session, few made it to the floor. So, while our bill was on the floor, I was not surprised it picked up 25 amendments.

On all the amendments except one, I voted in a way that would be considered favorable to pro-life organizations. That exception was Amendment #22. Clearly, there were many Representatives who had concerns about Amendment #22. When the motion to table was called, it prevailed 72-65. I voted to table.

Later, some members changed their vote in the House Journal, which is well within their rights. When the changes to the votes were made, the final tally was 70 to table and 72 not to table. I was NOT one of those who changed their vote.

My reservations with Amendment #22, dealt with severe fetal abnormalities. While I made this vote in good faith, it was certainly not an "easy" vote for me.

At the end of many hours of debate, when the final vote was called on SB 8, it passed 96-47. I was humbled to have been an author of the legislation. eb4

As the 85th Session Winds Down:

We are quickly nearing the end of the 85th session. As you know, the Texas Legislature operates under the biennial system and convenes its regular session at noon on the second Tuesday in January of odd-numbered years. The regular session lasts 140 days and is scheduled for adjournment sine die on May 29, 2017. Although we only meet 140 days, there will still be much work to do, both in Austin and in the district. eb4

Two of the many issues I want to begin addressing back in the House District 18, include: Anticipated Growth and Property Taxes.

#1. ANTICIPATED GROWTH: HD 18 is growing and the need to be prepared can not be stressed enough. Together, with the County Judges, Commissioners, Mayors, City Councils, EDC's, etc., I will continue to work on issues surrounding current and anticipated growth.

This session we have learned valuable lessons about unintended consequences when we don't start early to address growth. I am concerned about obvious things, such as housing, infrastructure, county government, first responders, public schools, and our water. As we grow, the demands impact every facet of our counties.

Every citizen in our district is impacted by rapid growth, one way or another. Being proactive and thinking outside the box before we have a problem, we won't have to be reactive after the fact.

#2. PROPERTY TAXES: This session, I have seen many issues associated with true, sustainable tax reform. School taxes are the largest part of a property owners tax bill.

On many levels, funding public schools is a shell game. The state is required to fund schools equitably. A simple explanation: Property rich schools have to send money to the state so they can allocate it to property poor schools. What a property poor school can't generate in local tax dollars, the state doles out the rest.

But, when local property valuations go up (which they are continuing in HD 18), local tax revenue goes up. The net result is the state doesn't have to kick in as much. The majority of areas in HD18 have little in terms of industry or big business to help pick up the tax tab, and local property owners simply can not continue to sustain the system at the rate taxes are increasing.

In many ways, problem #1-Growth, directly impacts problem #2-Property Taxes and funding public schools. By working on these issues over the interim, we will be better prepared for next session.