

## **THIRTEEN NEW LAWS MAKE IT OUT OF THE SPECIAL SESSION**

In mid-August, the 30-day special session of the Texas Legislature concluded. The special session was called by Governor Abbott to address a series of his top priorities, and I am pleased to report that we passed legislation that will impact thirteen of those priorities. Here is a brief run-down of the new state laws passed during this special session:

### **Teacher Retirement Health Coverage**

During the regular session of the legislature in the spring, we added \$350 million in the budget to increase the contribution rate and address the shortfall in TRS-Care, the health care program for retired teachers. In this special session, we added another \$212 million to further buy down premiums and assist those under TRS-Care in taking care of adult dependents with special needs. I was a co-author of this legislation and believe it is critical that we live up to the promises we have made to our retired teachers.

### **School Finance Commission**

House Bill 21, which I also co-authored, provides the framework to establish a Texas Commission on Public School Finance. I am very excited about this commission because it is the first tangible step I've seen towards ending the Robin Hood school finance system and changing the way in which we finance public schools so that we no longer saddle property owners with an unjust tax system that punishes them for owning their piece of Texas.

As you may recall, I authored House Bill 285 in the special session which would have entirely eliminated the portion of a property owner's tax bill dedicated to the maintenance and operation (M&O) of school districts and replaced it with an increase in the state sales tax. This would have provided real property tax relief by cutting the average homeowner's property tax bill by almost half. Unfortunately, my bill never made it to the floor of the House for a vote, but I am encouraged that the new commission will consider my legislation and other creative solutions to finally address the skyrocket cost of property taxes.

### **Additional State Aid for School Districts**

House Bill 30 provides a supplemental appropriation for school finance. Most importantly it allocates \$150 million in A.S.A.T.R. grants for school districts who will experience a loss of revenue during the 2017-18 or 2018-19 school years because of a reduction in tax revenue for the district. I supported this legislation because it will impact several school districts in our area, and it's important that we continue to properly fund our schools until we find a permanent solution to the school finance mess. This bill also allocates \$40 million for grants to school districts and open-enrollment charters schools that provide innovative services to students with dyslexia and autism.

### **Pro-Life Legislation**

Three pieces of pro-life legislation were passed in this special session, all of which I co-authored. House Bill 214 removes mandatory coverage for elective abortions from health insurance plans, regardless of whether it is a government plan or a private plan. Texas is now the 25<sup>th</sup> state to pass limits on coverage for abortions in health insurance.

House Bill 13 requires hospitals and clinics to report any complication or injury resulting from an abortion separate from a general complication of maternal health. This will allow the state to better track the impact abortions have on women across Texas.

And finally, House Bill 215 requires physicians to document and report the method by which a minor obtained authorization for an abortion, and also requires physicians performing a third trimester abortion due to severe fetal abnormality to certify the type of abnormality identified.

### **Mail-In Ballot Fraud**

I co-sponsored Senate Bill 5, and also co-authored its House companion, House Bill 184. The new law increases existing penalties for those who knowingly and intentionally deceive, mislead or misinform voters, and it increases safeguards for mail-in ballots to ensure their integrity against voter fraud.

### **Municipal Annexation**

Senate Bill 6 seeks to end the abuse of annexation power that some larger cities have exercised in recent years. The bill will only allow certain cities to annex properties in their E.T.J., requires property owner and resident approval in certain situations, and requires an election for annexation by voters in the area in other situations. It also includes provisions to protect business owners from municipal regulations that could force them to close.

### **Credit for Tree Mitigation Fees**

Some cities impose “tree mitigation” fees on property owners. House Bill 7 requires those cities to compensate those property owners with credits for trees planted. These credits will help encourage the planting of more trees and offset the amount of the mitigation fee. Similar legislation passed almost unanimously during the regular session ending in May.

### **Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Task Force**

Senate Bill 17 directs the Health and Human Services Commission to address the most common causes of maternal death and study options for reducing severe maternal morbidity costs. This includes a variety of initiatives from information sharing between agencies and health care providers to screenings for substance abuse and domestic

violence to improving quality in the Medicaid program. I co-sponsored this bill and co-authored its House companion, House Bill 9.

### **Sunset Legislation**

I supported both Senate Bills 20 and 60 in order to allow the continued operation of the Texas Medical Board, the Board of Examiners of Psychologists, the Board of Examiners of Marriage and Family Therapists, the Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors, and the Board of Social Worker Examiners. Had we not passed these bills, then the boards in question would have ceased to exist as of September 1, ending oversight of these professions.

### **DNR Orders**

Senate Bill 11 and House Bill 12 clarifies that an attending physician may issue a Do Not Resuscitate order on a patient if that patient's death is imminent, it is medically appropriate, and is does not conflict with the wishes of the patient. I co-authored House Bill 12.

As you can see, it was a busy 30-days in Austin, but I believe we passed some sound pieces of legislation that addressed a majority of the Governor's priority items. As always, it is a privilege to represent you in the Texas House of Representatives, and I welcome your comments and opinions. Please visit my website at [www.AndrewMurr.org](http://www.AndrewMurr.org) or contact our District Office in Kerrville (715 Water St.) at (830) 257-0432 and let me hear from you.