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January 23, 2015 | Regular Session, Issue 3

Each Friday, the *Austin Newsletter* provides a summary of legislation important to Texas Farm Bureau members. Please do not hesitate to contact the appropriate staff with any questions.

## Session Update

On Tuesday, Jan. 20, 2015, Texas swore in the state's first new governor since 2000, Greg Abbott, and the first new lieutenant governor since 2003, Dan Patrick.

## 2016-2017 Budget

Speaker Straus (R-San Antonio) has released a starting budget for the House during the next two years. The legislature has the most control over about 50 percent of the budget, general revenue. Much of the remainder is federal funds.

The House is working well within the confines of Comptroller Hegar's estimate of \$113 billion. This is amidst a depression in oil prices and still about \$10 billion more than in the current biennium. The House is only expecting to spend \$98.8 billion, a 3.9 percent increase from the current \$95.2 billion. The increase accounts for inflation and population growth.

State leaders have reiterated the importance of adequately meeting the state's needs while not only raising revenue mechanisms but delivering savings to everyday Texans.

Current budget proposals and summaries can be found [here](#).

The Senate will also initiate a budget proposal. Senator Jane Nelson, Senate Finance chairwoman, is expected to release it soon.

## Tax on Vehicle Miles

[HB 151](#), by Representative Ryan Guillen (D-Rio Grande City), would create a tax on the

number of miles driven by a vehicle between state inspections. The tax would:

- \* cost drivers a penny per mile traveled
- \* be charged to the registered owner of the vehicle
- \* be deposited in the State Highway Fund

However, the vehicle owner would get credit for the fuel taxes paid during the tax year. This credit would benefit vehicle owners with larger vehicles that drive a lot of miles each year. But, it would be less beneficial for those who drive more fuel efficient vehicles.

A vehicle owner who pays the tax in a lump sum would receive a discount on the amount due. Vehicles driven less than 5,000 miles between inspections would be exempt. If the amount due for the tax would be less than the cost of collecting the tax, no tax would be imposed on the vehicle owner.

The bill also requires that a monthly payment plan be made available to vehicle owners.

TFB **opposes** HB 151. (TFB Policy 141, pg. 40, lines 32-34.)

## TAHC Commissioner Requirements and Composition

[HB 809](#), by Representatives James White (R-Hillister), would increase the number of governor-appointed commissioners who serve on the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) from 13 to 15. The bill requires the two new commissioner positions to be:

- \* An individual who raises 20 or fewer "animal units" of livestock each year, and that Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service adopt rules to determine how many livestock of a species constitute an "animal unit" based on the amount of forage consumed by livestock of that species.
- \* An individual who raises poultry, but no more than 100 birds each year.

The bill also adds that a person or their spouse is ineligible to be appointed as a general public commissioner if they are employed by, participate in the management, or own more than 10 percent interest in a business or organization which has a significant portion of its animal operations regulated by TAHC.

TFB is **neutral** on HB 809. TFB does not have policy supporting or opposing the addition of TAHC commissioners. (TFB Policy 107, pg. 5, lines 1-3.)

## Land Use Rollback Taxes

[HB 133](#), by Representative David Simpson (R-Longview), deletes the section of the Tax Code that imposes rollback taxes for changing the use of open-use land.

This bill removes the 5 years of taxes, plus interest, that is charged to landowners when land is no longer used for agriculture purposes.

TFB supports eliminating the interest penalty on rollback taxes. But, it does not support complete elimination of the rollback tax. Therefore, TFB is **neutral** on HB 133. (TFB Policy 140, pg. 34, lines 54-57.)

## Eminent Domain for Recreational Purposes

[SB 178](#), by Senator Robert Nichols (R-Jacksonville), would prohibit the power of eminent domain from being used to allow governmental or private entities to take property for recreational purposes. Such recreational purposes include parks and recreation systems, parks, greenbelts or trails. This bill would still allow the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to purchase land for use as a park without using eminent domain.

TFB **supports** SB 178. (TFB Policy 149, pg. 57, lines 111-112.)

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