

## April '17 Austin Report

Things are finally starting to get moving a little faster in the Legislature, with the House and Senate still at odds with each other over the budget, the bathroom bill and a few other topics threatening to stymie progress on other legislation. We are hopeful that full funding for the Animal Health Commission for fever ticks will remain in both chambers' budget versions.

The biggest news for us this week was a Senate committee hearing on eminent domain bills on Monday. Representing STPRA was Director and Eminent Domain Committee Chair Eric Opiela, who did a superb job of testifying in support of SB 740 by Sen. Lois Kolkhorst. Our allied organizations were represented as well; Jim Bradbury, who spoke at our annual meeting, testified on behalf of our landowner coalition, Texans for Property Rights.

SB 740 is a large omnibus bill which addresses several major issues, but the most controversial is the provision which awards attorneys' fees to the landowner if he/she is awarded an amount in court that exceeds the condemnor's offer by 120 percent or more. Needless to say, the pipeline and utility interests appeared at the hearing in opposition and the bill was left pending in committee. Our public affairs consultant, Joey Park, is communicating frequently with representatives of condemnor groups in an effort to find common ground. Happily, three bills by Senator Schwertner dealing with eminent domain disclosures and buy-back provisions easily passed through committee.

There are a number of groundwater regulation bills that are making their way through the process, none of them seemingly too alarming, and mostly favorable, for landowners. One exception, however, is a bill that could deprive landowners of their rights by water companies, but that bill's future is in grave doubt. Another bill of note, which looks destined for passage, is a provision by Chairman Larson requiring representatives of all 16 water planning regions in the state to meet on a regular basis to promote inter-regional cooperation.

Also on the positive side, HB 2306 by Rep. Guillen was heard on Tuesday that would reimburse law enforcement agencies who use auction proceeds from seized property to compensate landowners for damages suffered from bailouts. We will be following this bill as it moves through the process.