

TEXAS PRESS ASSOCIATION

State Capital



HIGHLIGHTS

By Ed Sterling

Spigot is open: Flow of legislative bills, resolutions begins

AUSTIN — On Nov. 10, dozens among Texas' 31 state senators and 150 state representatives, including a few members-elect who won't be sworn in for nearly two months, jumped right in and filed legislative bills in advance of the 84th regular session of the Texas Legislature, which convenes on Tuesday, Jan. 13.

In all last week, 316 House and 170 Senate bills, proposed constitutional amendments and commemorative resolutions were filed. These are samples of the subject matter in those early-filed bills: acceptable forms of voter identification, use of a portable wireless communication device while operating a motor vehicle, repeal of the franchise tax, property tax reform, minimum wage increase, changes regarding the offense of student hazing, and free pre-kindergarten in public schools. The bill-filing deadline is the 60th day of the session, March 13. By then, lawmakers likely will have filed more than 10,000 bills and resolutions.

In other news, Sen. Glenn Hegar, R-Katy, who was elected state comptroller on Nov. 4, announced he will resign from the Senate effective Dec. 5. Gov. Rick Perry set Dec. 6 as the date for a special election to fill the seat opened by Hegar's departure. State Rep. Lois Kolkhorst, R-Brenham, is in the race for the seat. Kolkhorst is chair of the

House Committee on Public Health and a member of the House Committee on County Affairs. Other candidates for the seat are expected to file declarations soon.

New effort to help veterans

A pilot project, the Texas Veterans Initiative, will allow a \$1 million investment by the state to match local and private funds to expand and evaluate community-based mental health programs serving veterans and their families.

In a Nov. 10 announcement, Gov. Rick Perry, Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst and House Speaker Joe Straus said that if the pilot phase generates widespread interest from communities around the state, the Legislature could act in 2015 to expand it. The project will be funded through the budget of the Texas Health and Human Services Commission.

"This project brings communities together to provide better outcomes for Texans who served our country in uniform," Straus said. "It's a smart, effective way to address an issue that affects veterans across this state. This pilot program is a very good starting point as we head into the legislative session."

Texas Health and Human Services Commissioner Kyle Janek said, "The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs currently offers a variety of mental health programs, but there are still many gaps and geographic barriers. The Texas Veterans Initiative will create an opportunity for Texas communities to come together to fill those gaps and improve the delivery of mental health services to veterans and their families for years to come."

Ebola monitoring reaches end

Texas Department of State Health Services Commissioner David Lakey announced that the last person being monitored in connection with the state's three diagnosed Ebola patients was cleared from twice-daily monitoring by the end of the day on Nov. 6.

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state. A fertilized egg can't survive an ectopic pregnancy, and letting it continue can do harm to the mother. I can't imagine anybody thinking what Wendy did was wrong. It's just common sense.

What I don't understand is how people get so riled up about abortion, which has been legal since 1973, but run from stances that could prevent abortions! Even if *Roe v. Wade* is overturned, abortions will happen. It's like prohibition. I personally think booze should be banned in most cases because of the many problems it causes. But, people kept on getting bootleg booze and some died drinking the homemade stuff. So prohibition didn't work well.

Why not keep women's right to choose in place, and do something about preventing abortions? I read the following from the Progress Texas website: "If you want to prevent abortions, you make sure everyone has health care, a high school education, and birth control. Not the exact opposite."

Why not sell birth control pills over the counter? It would decrease the number of abortions. Hey, we sell tobacco and booze over the counter.

But, it's much easier to rail against Wendy Davis and those of us who are Pro Choice, instead of railing against the politicians, mostly Republican, who want more private schools, and want to ban Obamacare. Why would so many in the GOP, who call themselves Christians, be against the Affordable Health Care Act? Could it be just being against the President for the sake of saying, "No?"

Do you remember the GOP shut down last year? That added to the deficit and did much harm, and the Republicans didn't suffer in the election because of that. Are our memories that short?

Many of the meager one-third of the populace who bothered to vote on Nov. 4 live in states where the uninsured rate has plummeted, and still voted for Republican candidates who op-

pose the Affordable Care Act.

I read a comment from a poor Kentucky woman, who works as an eBay warehouse packer, and said she was grateful for her new Medicaid coverage (Kentucky has its own health insurance exchange). She said she was born and raised Republican and, "I ain't planning on changing now." Now, I ask you, is that voting against your own pocketbook, as so many blue collar folks do?

I agree with Gail Collins of the *New York Times* who said the most depressing result for her was Sam Brownback's being re-elected governor in Kansas, after he wrecked the state's economy. What is the name for a Republican who votes like a yellow dog Democrat?

The Democrats who were running, for the most part, did a pitiful job of campaigning, running from President Obama. Why didn't they run on how important Obamacare is, how we aren't in a Great Depression now, how jobs have increased, and on and on. Running from POTUS didn't help in most instances.

This young Democratic woman from Kentucky, Allison Grimes, who ran against Mitch McConnell, didn't have the gumption to say she had voted for President Obama. Puhleez!

For the many people in Texas who didn't bother to vote for people who want an increase in minimum wage, you should be ashamed. Why not vote for people who want to create good jobs and improve the nation's roads and bridges, expand quality pre-K programs?

And for Wisconsin to re-elect Scott Walker. Wow! The GOP has done a good job of making it impossible to organize unions in the private sector. We all know every public organization (and private for that matter in many cases) has opportunities for abuse, and unions are no exceptions. But, without unions, there would not have been the former great Middle Class. I can assure you that owners and managers aren't often big on being pro labor. Remember the movie

Norma Rae, in which Sally Field won an Academy Award for portraying a real life minimum wage textile worker, Crystal Sutton, who worked to unionize the textile factories.

Too many middle class folks and blue collar folks put people in power who are not their friends, economically. It's mind-boggling!

Maybe it wasn't smart to run against the Koch Brothers, because many folks don't care about them. Harry Reid tried that. These powerfully rich brothers are against Medicare and Social Security. Really, do you want their funding your candidates?

It's hard to appeal to poor white and poor minority candidates at the same time. Collins writes that she doesn't think Republicans are meeting uneducated white voters' needs (who overwhelmingly voted GOP), but are appealing to their fear of change. Amen to that!

The Republicans' base wants to think they hate government, but many of them benefit greatly from government programs. Would someone rational explain that to me? It's been going on way too long.

And, for those Hispanic Democrats who voted, thank you. But, far too many don't bother to vote, which is essentially harming you.

By the way, if you don't want to vote electronically, which is the only way you can vote in Castro County, call the County Clerk's office and request to be mailed a ballot, and you should get one for every election for a year without having to ask each time. That way, you don't have to bother with the machines. I think these machines have kept some voters from voting.

Rachel, my daughter who lives in Grapevine, said that paper ballots are still used there. I guess there aren't enough machines, and since there are more people who live there than in Hart, it's easier for many to vote by paper. Sounds good to me.