

Valley & State

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House committee will tackle eminent domain; little resistance expected

"... while there is nothing wrong with economic development and all that, people shouldn't have their homes taken away solely for that reason."

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AUSTIN — The Texas House of Representatives is scheduled to debate today in a conference committee meeting and as a full body whether to ban local governments from taking properties for economic development purposes.

The House Land and Resource Management Committee will talk about House Bill 73, which provides statutory power in banning governing bodies from using eminent domain to spur the growth of local tax bases. The bill is sponsored by Rep. Aaron Peña, D-Edinburg, and was filed June 29 — less than a week after the U.S. Supreme Court decided to allow the practice in a 5-4 vote in

Kelo vs. City of New London.

Peña said the bill would provide immediate protection for property owners if passed by the Legislature during the special session, which ends July 20.

"The danger of waiting until next session means the opportunity for abuse is so great," he said.

All members of the Rio Grande Valley delegation except Rep. Ryan Guillen, D-Rio Grande City, signed on as authors and co-authors for House Joint Resolution 19, which calls for a state constitutional amendment banning the locally driven eminent domain actions. The primary author for the legislation is Rep. Frank Corte Jr., R-San Antonio.

The resolution has received bipartisan support.

"I think it is because people

recognize while there is nothing wrong with economic development and all that, people shouldn't have their homes taken away solely for that reason," Rep. Veronica Gonzales, D-McAllen, said. "For the government to take your home, there should be a very good reason, a very strong necessity."

Rep. Armando "Mando" Martinez, D-Weslaco, said he considered the resolution a way to help constituents.

"I would hate to see anybody to lose their own property because of this Supreme Court decision," he said.

Peña said the resolution should pass the House "as quick as a knife running through hot butter."

"The same concerns that we have on the House side, they have

on the Senate side," he said. "I expect it to be signed when it hits the governor's desk."

Gov. Rick Perry announced Monday that tuition revenue bonds and judicial pay raises increases have been added to the special session.

Legislators reconvened June 21 in Austin to solve the state's ongoing school finance and property tax dilemmas. Area legislators have said in the past the governor would add more topics to discuss only when progress has been made on his top two issues.

"Hopefully, we will have a lot of positive feedback before the end of the session," Martinez said.

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Veronica Gonzales,
state representative,
D-McAllen

