

Legislation Authored, Joint Authored and Sponsored by Rep. Gonzales

Turning on the light in colonias – HB 775 provides for 5-15% of federal community development block grant funds which go to cities, to be used for street lights in colonias. This legislation affects any area with colonias located within 150 miles from the international border.

Providing assistance to students, junior colleges and technical schools – HB 993 assists students at public junior colleges and technical schools by allowing them to pay their summer school tuition in payments. HB 994 allows public junior colleges and technical schools to assess charges to students to pass a course the first or second time and to permit colleges and technical schools to recoup some of the contract hour funding lost on repeat courses.

Widening the pool of persons who can become police officers – 40 is the new 30! This legislation expands the age of beginning police officers from 36 to 45 as long as the applicant meets the requirements and passes the exams set by the municipality. This will allow qualified individuals the opportunity to serve their communities.

Protecting youth along the border – HB 3426 joint-authored by Rep. Gonzales establishes a bi-national substance abuse task force that will examine the effects of alcohol and drugs on residents along the Texas-Mexico border, with emphasis on residents between the ages of 14-25. The task force will make recommendations to the Legislature about how to combat the problems without criminalizing teenagers. The task force will also study the effects of drug traffickers using young residents along the border to transport illegal drugs in border communities.

Improving the judicial system

Juror Pay Raise – Talk about time for a pay increase! Texas jurors are the lowest paid in the nation and have not received a pay increase in 50 years. The \$6,000 paid daily to jurors often doesn't even cover the cost of parking or lunch. This legislation increases the daily amount paid to jurors from \$6.00 to \$40.00.

New District and County Courts – Justice delayed is justice denied. According to census reports, Hidalgo County's population is expected to increase to 700,000 by 2006. With an increase in population comes an increase in court cases. In order to keep up with the growth, this legislation creates a 6th County Court and a 10th District Court in Hidalgo County.

Equal treatment for Appellate Court Judges – Appellate Court Justices that came in mid-term were being required to serve more than two terms in order to be eligible for retirement benefits because of how the statute was worded. This bill puts all appellate court judges on equal footing by allowing all justices to be eligible for retirement after serving twelve years (the equivalent of two full terms).

Economic Development

Emerging Technology Fund – The Legislature voted to create an Emerging Technology Fund to assist projects around the State that attract jobs and make Texas a leader in the development of technology. Rep. Gonzales continues to work with local business and education leaders on a massive job research and developmental plan, known as the Rapid Response Manufacturing Plan that, if funded, would create countless jobs and expand economic development in the Rio Grande Valley.

Specialty stores get a boost – This legislation gives wine-only stores the ability to hold wine tastings on the premises, just as the liquor stores are able to do. Giving customers the right to taste before they buy promotes sales and boosts the economy.

Promoting better government

Open Government – Legislation sponsored by Rep. Gonzales requires municipalities, counties, school districts, junior college districts, and economic development corporations that maintain websites to post notice of meetings as well as the entire agenda packets of those meetings of their websites.

Continuity in Service – Currently, a citizen appointed to a civil service commission in a municipality may not have held a public office during the three years prior to appointment. When this section of the Local Government Code was passed by the Legislature in 1987, the legislature’s intent was to prevent political influence from entering the civil service process. This language, however, prevents the reappointment of a commissioner who has held public office in the previous year by serving on the civil service commission. HB 150 amends the Local Government Code to allow a municipality to reappoint a commission member to consecutive terms.

Protecting the Public

Providing immediate emergency care – Currently, emergency medical services (EMS) cannot respond to an accident, fire, disaster, or any other emergency situation outside their respective municipality without the scene first being secured by a law enforcement officer of that county or municipality if there is a possible threat of any kind against the ambulance personnel. For various reasons, a municipal police officer may arrive on a crime scene before a county law enforcement officer, but the municipal police officer is not able to secure the area because it lies outside of the officer’s jurisdiction. The EMS team is therefore unable to administer emergency care until the officer deployed by that jurisdiction arrives and secures the scene. This could result in the victims of the crime or accident being denied immediate emergency care. This legislation gives a municipality the option to allow a municipal police officer to accompany a municipal ambulance to a scene outside its respective municipality whenever the ambulance personnel can be placed in harm’s way.