

Capitol Comments

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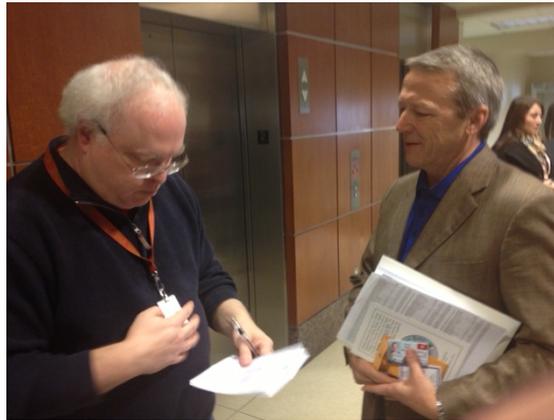


Representative
Ron Simmons

UNDER THE DOME

The first two weeks of the 83rd Legislative Session have been a busy time!

We arrived on Saturday, January 5th and were given the keys to our offices in the Capitol complex and spent the weekend moving in and preparing for the Legislative Session.



*Rep. Simmons takes possession of his office keys from
Chris Greisel, House Parliamentarian, on Saturday, January 5th.*

On January 8th the 83rd Texas Legislature was sworn in during a ceremony that has occurred on a regular basis since 1836 and in the current Capitol building since 1881. It was a very moving and memorable time for my family and me and one we will certainly never forget. We were extremely blessed that my Mom, who is battling some health challenges, was able to make the trip down and that our daughter, Allie Beth, did not have to leave for college until the next day.



Rep. Simmons with his wife, Lisa, and family together on Swearing In Day.

Also occurring on the first day of session was the election of the Speaker of the House. Any member of the House of Representatives may run for Speaker and up until January 8th there were two candidates: Rep. Joe Straus (Speaker of the House in the 82nd Legislature) and Rep. David Simpson. However, by the morning of January 8th, Representative Simpson had withdrawn his candidacy once he was confident he did not have the votes to win. This was an honorable move on the part of Representative Simpson. At that point, Joe Straus was named Speaker of the House by acclamation.

Later in the first week, we voted to remove some of the funds allocated to operate the House from the Speaker's office to the office budgets of the members. This change decentralized some of the funds, allowing Representatives to use the resources to better serve their districts. We also joined the Speaker of the House and the Lieutenant Governor in asking the Texas Ethics Commission NOT to raise our per diem allowance as the Commission had previously recommended.

The second week started with a day-long debate on the Rules under which the House will operate, a process undertaken at the beginning of each Session. The vast majority of the "rules" from the previous Session are usually adopted again; however, there are always some tweaks, or in the case of this year, major changes that are made. The most important change this Session is that a Bill will no longer be stopped because of a clerical, non-significant error made in the drafting of the Bill or in the Committee process. In the past, many pieces of good legislation were "killed" due to Members who did not like the main purpose of the bill finding a technical or clerical error such as a missing period. (I know what you are thinking - Ridiculous!) I agree with Rep. Phil King, and that is why I supported the amendment stopping this. I supported other amendments to the Rules that did not pass that I felt would have provided more transparency to citizens and some of them were adopted but others were not. All in all, I believe we operate under a reasonable but certainly not perfect set of Rules.

In addition to the time spent on the House floor, I spent much of the first two weeks meeting and strategizing with my staff - Eric Stratton, Chief of Staff; Mark Yarbrough, District Director; and Ben Lancaster, Legislative Aide; plus our interns, Caroline Chadwick, Aiman Tinwala, and Nicole DeCair.

There are many different "Caucuses" in the Legislature from the obvious Republican and Democratic Caucuses to groups like the Energy Caucus (I am a member), the Rural Caucus, and the Young Legislators Caucus (I am a member of this as well since the average age of citizens in District 65 is below age 40), just to name a few. Most all of these Caucuses met

and elected their leadership this past week. I am looking forward to working with all like minded Members who are interested in promoting a low tax, pro family, pro business, and pro life agenda.

IN THE DISTRICT

A few months ago we were notified by a concerned citizen and town council member from the Town of Hebron that a new liquor store was to be built at the northeast corner of Hebron Parkway and Charles Street. With the close proximity to churches, neighborhoods, and schools (Hebron High School, Carrollton Christian Academy, and Prestonwood Christian Academy), there was significant concern about this business in the community. I, along with the majority of the citizens in District 65, are very much pro-business, yet there is on rare occasion a time when a particular type of business at a particular location is not a good idea. We worked with concerned citizens, the City of Carrollton, some of the Hebron Town Council members, First Baptist Hebron, and Prestonwood Christian Academy to coordinate an effort which voiced our concerns with the Texas Alcohol and Beverage Commission (TABC). This effort culminated in a hearing on January 15th before Judge Robert Ramirez where he denied the permit to have a liquor store at Hebron and Charles. Judge Ramirez, in his comments to those in attendance, said he had never seen such a strong community action at a hearing of this type in his history. I want to applaud those citizens who stepped forward. This outcome proves that your voice DOES make a difference!

Finally, out of tragedy often rises the very best in the human spirit, and it was no different when a natural gas explosion accident in the City of Lewisville cost one citizen his life and several others their homes--some temporarily and some permanently. Christian Community Action (CCA) owned the property where the accident occurred, and under the leadership of the President, Ron Batts, they immediately did what they do best--identified local needs and went to work to meet those needs. Community support from counseling to temporary housing in hotel rooms has been outstanding and makes all of us proud to be a part of a serving community. If you want to help these families (10 families displaced at least temporarily), please send your donations or contact CCA at www.ccahelps.org/ways_to_give/ or call 972-219-4375

NEWS BRIEFS

I was also featured in the news:

On Gun Rights –

- KEYE TV CBS Austin Evening news. http://www.keyetv.com/news/features/top-stories/stories/vid_6397.shtml

I hope you find this newsletter helpful and informative. We will continue to provide updates from the Capitol on a regular basis. My staff and I are here to represent and serve you, so please feel free to contact us with your comments and questions.

Best regards,



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