



NEWS Texas/Southwest

Perry kills bills on property rights, Trans-Texas Corridor

Legislature: Perry vetoes 49 measures, protects his favorite initiatives

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AUSTIN – A property rights bill that went awry and a mandate for the Trans-Texas Corridor to follow the state's existing highway system were among the 49 bills that fell victim to Gov. Rick Perry's veto pen on Friday.

Mr. Perry targeted at least two bills that he believed would open the courthouse doors to more litigation, including a bill that would have provided a greater balance in eminent domain proceedings. The bill spelled out what public land uses were acceptable in order to take private land and provided more recourse for land owners.

GOVERNORS' VETOES

Vetoes issued by Texas governors since 1991:

2007: Rick Perry, 52 vetoes

2005: Rick Perry, 20

2003: Rick Perry, 50

2001: Rick Perry, 83*

1999: George W. Bush, 35

1997: George W. Bush, 38

1995: George W. Bush, 26

1993: Ann Richards, 27

1991: Ann Richards, 36

*Record for a Texas governor

SOURCE: Legislative Reference

But a provision tacked onto the bill late in the session would have allowed landowners to recover damages for access problems brought by road construction and changes in traffic patterns. The provision would have cost taxpayers potentially many millions of dollars, the governor said.

Officials from Dallas, Denton, Plano, Fort Worth and Frisco were among the dozens of public entities writing the governor urging him to veto the bill, said Mr. Perry's press secretary, Robert Black.

"This bill will slow down and shut down needed construction projects through the creation of a new category of damages that are beyond the pale of reason," Mr. Perry said in a written statement.

Property rights groups were disappointed in the bill's demise.

"Unfortunately, this veto exposes property owners from Freeport to El Paso to the very real threat of eminent domain," said Bill Peacock of the conservative think-tank Texas Public Policy Foundation, who described the bill as one of the most significant landowner rights initiatives in more than a decade.

Mr. Perry also vetoed a bill that would have fine-tuned the sweeping lawsuit limits that were passed in 2003 by allowing injured people to recover more in medical costs. Mr. Perry said those hurt should be allowed to collect only actual medical expenses and not broader estimates of the expense.

The governor also used vetoes to protect some of his favorite initiatives – the Texas Enterprise Fund, in which he doles out money for business

relocation incentives, and the Trans-Texas Corridor, a giant swath of tollways and highways.

A bill that would have diverted \$13 million from the Enterprise Fund for employment and training was killed, as was a mandate that the highway corridor should tap into the existing free roadway system as much as possible.

In his veto message, Mr. Perry said that selecting the route for the Trans-Texas Corridor could undercut the selection of the environmentally best route for the highway.

Among the bills also axed by the governor were two by Rep. Lois Kolkhorst, R-Brennan, who fought for a moratorium on tollways, and another two by Rep. Dennis Bonnen, R-Angleton, who reversed the governor's mandate for a human papillomavirus vaccine for teenage girls.

Among the losses: a scholarship program for prison correctional officers by Ms. Kolkhorst and a study touted by Mr. Bonnen as the state's first energy plan, outlining the needs and environmental costs of producing electricity over the next five years.

Mr. Black said the vetoes were in no way retaliation for challenging the governor.

"Every bill stands on its own, and in this case they were just bad bills," he said. "I think the governor looked at every bill on its merit. He generally has a philosophy that government should do a few things but do them very well."

Others who didn't fare well with the governor were offenders. Mr. Perry vetoed bills that would have provided ways for inmates to win back prison "good time" credits and that would have allowed education programs in prison segregation areas. Another bill vetoed by the governor could have relieved some county jail crowding by allowing offenders held on minor probation violations to be released on bail.

In all, Mr. Perry vetoed 52 bills and resolutions. Last month, he vetoed a transportation bill and a bill that would have notified former convicts if their right to vote had been restored.