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Sonogram, other laws take effect this week

Other rules Legislature OK'd involve property rights, driving drunk.

By Kelley Shannon / Special to the Express-News Updated 11:23 p.m., Sunday, August 28, 2011

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AUSTIN — New state laws on abortion, property rights, drunken driving and other aspects of Texans' lives go into effect Thursday.

Along with making deep cuts in the state's budget, Texas lawmakers this year passed bills cracking down on drunk drivers and making it more difficult for the government to take private property.

Other new laws ease up on regulations for farmers market products and allow for catching catfish with one's hands, a technique known as "noodling."

Much of the legislation takes effect Thursday, the first day of Texas' fiscal year.

Then Texans will begin to see how actions at the state Capitol affect their lives in ways large and small.

One new law requires a doctor to attempt to show a woman seeking an abortion a sonogram of the fetus, to describe the image and to provide the sound of the fetal heartbeat before the procedure. Federal Judge [Sam Sparks](#) is expected to rule before Thursday on a challenge to the law by the [Center for Reproductive Rights](#).

"This law is intrusive, patronizing to women and unconstitutional," said [Julie Rikelman](#), the center's lead attorney on the case. She said patients should be given only the information and medical tests appropriate for the circumstances and that a doctor should not have to act as a "government agent."

Republican Gov. [Rick Perry](#), who signed the bill into law, believes it will protect unborn life, spokeswoman [Catherine Frazier](#) said.

"It is absolutely crucial that women have all the information at their fingertips when making such a life-changing decision," she said.

Perry also placed eminent domain legislation on his emergency agenda this year. And a law taking effect Thursday puts more safeguards in place for private property owners when the government wants to take their land, said [Bill Peacock](#), vice president for research at the [Texas Public Policy Foundation](#).

The bill spells out that land only can be taken for "public use" to ensure that property cannot be seized for economic development, Peacock said. It also lays out circumstances in which a landowner can buy back property if it is not used as the government intended.

"It's a step in the right direction," Peacock said, predicting more work on the issue in the 2013 legislative session. "There are still quite a few things we can do in Texas to further protect private property rights."

Parts of a voter identification law that Republicans muscled through also take effect Thursday; full implementation will begin Jan. 1.

The act will require voters to present a driver's license or another specified form of government-issued photo identification, such as state photo ID, military ID, passport or concealed handgun license, along with a voter registration card to be able to cast a ballot at the polls.

Minority groups complained that the measure will unfairly target poorer voters because they are less likely to have photo ID.

"This went too far in having a very narrow list of documentation," said [Luis Figueroa](#), an

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attorney with the Mexican American [Legal Defense and Educational Fund](#). He said the state could have made the restrictions less onerous by allowing more forms of identification, such as student identification cards, VA cards or Social Security cards.

The state budget dominated the regular and special sessions, and key to the spending plan was school funding. Legislators cut public education by some \$4 billion over two years, and that reduction is starting to show in cuts by local districts.

Thousands of state employees also are losing their jobs because of cuts. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission on Thursday approved a drastically reduced budget for 2012 that reflects a 21.5 percent cut during the coming two years. So far, 111 people have been laid off within the agency.

The disability rights group ADAPT of Texas spoke out this past week against the budget cuts, saying that almost 12,000 disabled and older Texans will have home and community services reduced.

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Anymouse 9:06 AM on August 29, 2011
 Ah! The captivating subject of the recent legislative session...abortion.
 "...requires a doctor to attempt to show a woman seeking an abortion..."
 ATTEMPT is the operative word. This is all eyewash and much ado about nothing.
 Jeez, it's been several months since the legislative session ended...I wonder how many American men and women have been killed, wounded and/or maimed in Afghanistan and Iraq?
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olddude73 8:25 AM on August 29, 2011
 There is a good reason student ID cards are not valid forms of voter identification and that is that illegal aliens readily get student ID cards. On the other hand VA cards should be allowable as many non-driver disabled vets carry those. But some of these laws are petty and self-serving, while Texas remains at or near the bottom in education, hungry children, people and families with no health care coverage and massive fraud by practitioners under Medicaid. Add to this the corruption of our governor and legislators and Texas has little to be proud of. Where else are there so many minimum wage jobs created?
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Murrieta 6:35 AM on August 29, 2011
 Yes, prairiechik, let's put government back in the bedroom and in the medical office where it belongs. Families, schools, churches, social agencies, nor physicians can do the job.
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