

SUBJECT: Continuation of the Good Neighbor Commission

COMMITTEE: Government Organization: favorable, committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 6 ayes--Collazo, Bode, Ceverha, Chavez, Laney, Whaley  
0 nay  
1 present, not voting--Evans  
4 absent--Lalor, Ceverha, Gonzales, Jackson

WITNESSES: On--Rafael Quintanilla, Governor's Office of Migrant Affairs;  
Jack Cooney, Governor's Office of Regional Development

NOTE: For more information on this subject, see the House Study Group Sunset Report on the Good Neighbor Commission (April 26, 1979).

DIGEST: This bill continues the existence of the Good Neighbor Commission and makes an number of changes in its enabling statute. The commission's functions are narrowed and specified. They are to include information and translation services, research on inter-American affairs, and sponsorship of the Pan American Student Forum. Liaison work, establishing offices in Mexico, and other activities may be done upon the Governor's request.

Commission members must have expertise in inter-American affairs. All funds, except those of the Pan American Student Forum, are to be deposited in the State Treasury. PASF funds are to be subject to state audit. No staff or commission member can negotiate or make a contract without commission approval.

Several general principles of the Government Organization Committee that apply to non-licensing agencies are also included.

PRO: It is important that Texas improve its relations with Latin America. Mexican oil and gas resources, increasing trade and tourism, and the illegal alien problem are just some of the reasons better understanding and communication is needed.

Continuation and expansion of the Good Neighbor Commission is the best way to do the job. The GNC has the needed experience and contacts. These would be lost if a new commission is created or if GNC's functions are transferred to other agencies. The respect and recognition the Good

PRO  
(continued)

Neighbor Commission has acquired would go down the drain. The commission is well known as the central agency and clearing house for inter-American affairs. People wouldn't know whom to contact if the GNC was abolished.

Abolishing the current Good Neighbor Commission would be a slap in the face of Mexico. It would destroy an agency that has become a symbol of friendship and the fight against discrimination.

Abolishing the GNC would also indicate that Texas is not committed to the state's Mexican-American community.

The Good Neighbor Commission has done a good job, given its limited budget, staff, and facilities. Despite problems in the past, current commission members and staff are hard-working and committed to bettering inter-American relations.

Narrowing the commission's scope and specifying its duties will give it the direction it has lacked. It will be able to concentrate on doing a good job.

The provision on commission approval of contracts clears up ambiguity in the current law. It also ensures that that the commission will have control over the agency. The provision refers only to contracts made in the course of GNC duties, not private business of commission members or employees. It won't hinder the day-to-day work of the agency, either. The commission can give the executive director a blanket okay for routine administrative matters.

Pan American Student Forum funds are private monies that are administered by the GNC. They don't belong in the State Treasury. State audit and required annual financial reports will ensure they are properly handled.

The commission's functions do not overlap with those of other agencies. The GNC is the most appropriate agency to sponsor the Pan American Student Forum.

CON:

The provision requiring commission approval of contracts is much too broad. Under the current language, employees couldn't even rent an apartment without the commission's okay. Even if the contract restrictions apply only to work for the GNC, the language is broad enough to hamstring the normal administrative activities of the agency.

The Pan American Student Forum funds should be placed in the Treasury. This avoids conflict of interest problems that might arise if the commission was allowed to deposit the funds in a private bank. The funds could still be exempted from the appropriations process.

ALTERNATE  
CONS:

- 1) The best way to improve Texas' relations with Mexico and other Latin American countries is to create a new agency to handle good-will functions. The Good Neighbor Commission is incompetent and ineffective. It cannot demonstrate a single instance where it has substantially improved inter-American relations. Much of the agency's time is spent on travel and self-promotion. Good relations with Latin America are too important to entrust to the GNC. The commission's poor reputation would hinder any effort to upgrade and expand its activities.

Border problems are serious enough to require a separate agency to handle inter-American ties. Having a separate agency also shows the state's concern and desire for good relations with Latin America. A new commission would give Texas a fresh and vigorous goodwill program. The new agency could be called the Good Neighbor Commission to preserve current name recognition.

- 2) The commission's liaison work should be put in the Governor's Office under the Governor's direct control. There is no need to appoint a commission to hire the staff to do the liaison work. The Pan American Student Forum's valuable function should be given back to the Texas Education Agency.

Abolishing the GNC will also eliminate the overlap with South Texas Cultural Basin and the Southwest Border Regional Commission.

COMMENTARY:

A point of order may be raised against HB 1061 on the grounds that some committee members were not given notice of the meeting at which the committee report was approved.

The Sunset Commission made no recommendations on the Good Neighbor Commission. HB 270 by Representative Lance Lalor creates a new Commission on Inter American Resources with most of the functions that are given to the GNC by HB 1061.

Representative Von Dohlen plans to offer an amendment clarifying the provision on commission approval of contracts.