

SUBJECT: "Welcome to Texas" road signs honoring President Bush at state borders

COMMITTEE: Culture, Recreation, and Tourism — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 5 ayes — Hilderbran, Kuempel, Baxter, Gallego, Phillips

0 nays

2 absent — Dukes, Dunnam

WITNESSES: None

DIGEST: HB 137 would allow the Texas Department of Transportation (TXDOT) to erect a "Welcome to Texas" sign to designate the state boundary on an interstate, U.S. or state highway entering the state. The sign would have to include:

- a depiction of the state flag;
- the phrase "Drive Friendly — The Texas Way;" and
- the phrase "Welcome to Texas — Proud to be the Home of President George W. Bush"

The bill would take effect September 1, 2005. TXDOT would have to ensure that a "Welcome to Texas" sign erected before September 1, 2005, complied with the bill no later than January 1, 2006.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 137 would welcome visitors to Texas and honor the current president who is a Texas resident by directing TXDOT to update highway signs at the state borders to include references to President George W. Bush. When Bill Clinton was U.S. President, the state of Arkansas had similar signs welcoming visitors to that state. Texas should recognize its former governor in the same fashion by erecting signs at the border in his honor.

The bill is not meant to be political but rather to recognize an outstanding Texan, regardless of political party. The signs are changed on a regular basis, so they are more suited to displaying current information than references to past U.S. presidents from Texas, such as George H.W. Bush or Lyndon B. Johnson.

The cost of adding this text to existing signs would be minimal. TXDOT has indicated that it could absorb the expense in its existing budget.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

HB 137 would direct TXDOT to divert resources that could be put to better use. TXDOT would add panels to existing signs at eight interstate highways and 58 U.S. and state highways at a cost of \$28,650. By the time the signs were erected, George W. Bush would have three years remaining in his presidency but the signs could remain in place for seven to 10 years. Even if the signs did not have a political purpose, taxpayers should not have to finance this unnecessary expense.