

SUBJECT: Naming a portion of IH-20 as the Ronald Reagan Memorial Highway

COMMITTEE: Transportation — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 6 ayes — Krusee, Phillips, Callegari, Casteel, Deshotel, Hill

0 nays

3 absent — Hamric, Flores, West

WITNESSES: None

BACKGROUND: Transportation Code, sec. 225.001 states that the Texas Transportation Commission may not designate a part of the highway system by the name of a person, organization, or event, or by a symbol other than the regular highway number. Sec. 225.002 authorizes local governments to assign a memorial or other identifying designation to a part of the highway system. Any other authority to assign a memorial to a part of the highway system lies with the Legislature. Under sec. 225.021, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) may accept a grant or donation to assist in financing the construction and maintenance of a marker.

DIGEST: CSHB 55 would designate the part of Interstate Highway 20 located in Dallas and Tarrant counties as the Ronald Reagan Memorial Highway. The bill would direct TxDOT to design and construct memorial markers indicating the highway number and the designation as the Ronald Reagan Memorial Highway and to erect such markers at each end of the highway and at appropriate intermediate sites along the highway. TxDOT would be required to design, construct, and erect markers only to the extent that money was available for this purpose from a grant or donation of private funds.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2005.

SUPPORTERS SAY: In recognition of Ronald Reagan's statesmanship and leadership in national and world affairs and his public service to his beloved country, the Texas Legislature should name a section of highway in his honor. Ronald Reagan served as the 40th President of the U.S. from 1981 through

1988, choosing as his running mate and Vice President George H. W. Bush, a longtime Texan. Prior to his two terms as president, Reagan served with honor and distinction as governor of California. President Reagan was loved and admired by millions of Texans and Americans, inspiring their best hopes. This bill would allow the Legislature to recognize President Reagan's legacy.

In prior sessions, the Legislature has designated a section of U.S. Highway 290 as the Presidential Corridor in honor of Lyndon Baines Johnson and George H. W. Bush. The Legislature also has named a portion of two different Texas highways after Cesar Chavez, another national figure who was not a Texan. At least four other states with no direct connection to President Reagan — Alabama, Colorado, Florida, and Louisiana — have named state highways for him. There is no reason why Texas should not do the same.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

This bill would set a questionable precedent for the Legislature by naming a portion of a state highway for a non-Texan with no obvious ties to the state or the Dallas-Fort Worth area. President Reagan was not born in Texas, nor did he live in the state or spend any significant amount of time here. Given that Texas was the birthplace of two U.S. presidents (Dwight Eisenhower, Lyndon B. Johnson) and the adopted home state of two others (George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush), it would seem inappropriate to name a portion of a state highway for President Reagan or any president who lacks a strong connection to Texas.

NOTES:

The committee substitute added to the introduced bill the requirement that TxDOT design, construct, or erect markers for the President Reagan highway only to the extent that money was available from private grants or donations.

HB 540 by Bohac, et al, which would designate a portion of Highway 290 in Harris County as the Ronald Reagan Memorial Highway, passed the House on second reading on March 23 and is scheduled for third reading consideration today.

SB 499 by West, which would name the same portion of Interstate Highway 20 as CSHB 55 in Dallas and Tarrant counties the President William Jefferson Clinton Highway, has been referred to the Senate Transportation and Homeland Security Committee.

HB 110 by Wong, which would name the circle drive around the State Capitol the Ronald Reagan Circle, has been referred to the State Affairs Committee. HB 539 by Bohac, which would name the same circle for George W. Bush, is pending in the State Affairs Committee.