

SUBJECT: Exempting certain military personnel from the hunter education program

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

VOTE: 5 ayes — Hilderbran, Kuempel, Dunnam, Gallego, Phillips
0 nays
2 absent — Baxter, Dukes

WITNESSES: For — Jerry Patterson
Against — Richard Kerschiver; Frank Moore; Roger P. O'Dwyer
On — Steve Hall, Texas Parks & Wildlife Dept. - Hunter Education Program

BACKGROUND: Under the authority of Parks and Wildlife Code, sec. 62.014, the Parks and Wildlife Commission requires all hunters 12 years of age and older to take a state-approved hunter education course in order to lawfully hunt. The course teaches hunting safety, skills, and responsibility and costs \$10. Hunters born before 1972 are exempted from this requirement.

DIGEST: HB 552 would exempt from the hunter education course requirement hunters who were members of the U.S. military serving on active duty, and hunters who were honorably discharged from the U.S. military.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2005.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 552 would dispense with an unnecessary requirement for veterans and members of the military who hunt. Active and former military personnel have received extensive training in the use of weapons. In addition, they tend to be responsible citizens. Texas should honor members and veterans of the military by exempting them from the hunter education course requirement.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

Since the Parks and Wildlife Commission began requiring hunters to take the hunter education course, the annual number of hunting-related injuries has decreased by more than 50 percent and the number of fatalities has decreased even more. Being a responsible hunter and a responsible member of the military are not the same. For example, military personnel and veterans are not trained to observe zones of safety when firing a weapon, which is absolutely crucial in hunting. There are many ethical and safety considerations specific to hunting that military members and veterans need to learn.

NOTES:

The fiscal note projects that HB 552 would result in an annual decrease of \$7,500 in hunter education fees to the state's game, fish, and water safety account.