

**SUBJECT:** Allowing the use of certain taxes to keep Big Bend National Park open

**COMMITTEE:** Ways and Means — favorable, without amendment

**VOTE:** 9 ayes — Burrows, Guillen, Bohac, Cole, Martinez Fischer, Murphy, Noble, E. Rodriguez, Shaheen

0 nays

2 absent — Sanford, Wray

**WITNESSES:** For — Robert Alvarez, Brewster County Tourism Council; Justin Bragiel, Texas Hotel and Lodging Association

Against — None

**BACKGROUND:** Some have suggested that hotel occupancy tax revenues should be used to keep Big Bend National Park open in the event of a federal government shutdown.

**DIGEST:** HB 4152 would allow a county that bordered Mexico and contained a national park with more than 400,000 acres (Brewster County) to use hotel occupancy tax revenues for certain purposes if the national park (Big Bend National Park) closed or its essential visitor operations were significantly curtailed for more than three consecutive days due to a lack of federal funding or an emergency.

The tax revenues could be used to provide for the supplemental collection of waste, sanitation, and to protect the health, safety, and welfare of park visitors. Revenues also could be used to provide supplemental guidance and interpretive services for park visitors.

The county could enter into an agreement with a federal agency to facilitate the use of the revenues as provided by the bill. The county could not continue to expend revenue for the purposes authorized by the bill if the park was closed for more than 60 days in that fiscal year and could not

use revenues in an amount that exceeded the annual area hotel revenue attributable to visitors to Big Bend National Park.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2019.