

Guest Commentary

The Good, Bad and Ugly — Part 2

Nichols opposes converting existing roads to toll roads

By ROBERT NICHOLS
Senator District 3

Earlier this year, I wrote a guest column describing the problems surrounding private equity toll projects as they relate to Texas transportation policy. Specifically, the column outlined how partnering with private companies could result in a transportation monopoly.

During the 80th Legislative Session, Texas lawmakers were able to avoid this dangerous situation by placing a two-year moratorium on private equity toll projects. However, we now face an even more dangerous transportation scenario: forcing Texas taxpayers to pay tolls on roads they have already bought and paid for.

The Good
Utilizing tolls to build new roads, or even to add additional lanes to current

roads, is an innovative strategy that allows our infrastructure to keep pace with our growing population and transportation demand. Current state fuel taxes hardly cover the cost of maintaining current roads, much less building new ones, so a justifiable need exists for toll projects. There is a huge difference, however, between using tolls to pay for new projects and tolling hardworking Texas taxpayers for roads they have already purchased with their tax dollars.

The Bad
In 2005, legislators realized that previous legislation had granted the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) the authorization to toll existing roads — roads Texas taxpayers have already built with their tax dollars. At that time, they attempted to pass new legislation banning the practice, but the bill died in

the House committee. Therefore, legislators wishing to protect taxpayers had to settle for a compromise that would only allow TxDOT to toll existing lanes with the approval of local voters. In 2007, I filed SB 1268 which would have prohibited the conversion of existing lanes to toll roads. With the support of Lt. Governor David Dewhurst, the bill passed the Senate unanimously, but it again died in the House committee.

Because legislation prohibiting the conversion of existing lanes to toll roads continues to die in House committee, the compromise reached in 2005 continues to serve as state policy. This means members of a specific community could vote to toll existing roads coming into and out of their community — tolls they will very rarely have to pay unless they leave their community,

but that will obstruct the free flow of commerce and put our state at a competitive disadvantage to other states in our region like Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Louisiana.

The Ugly
As if the current situation is not bad enough, TxDOT now wants to expand its authority to toll existing interstate highways (highways we have already paid for with tax dollars) by “buying” them from the federal government so they can convert them to toll roads. That’s right, TxDOT wants to use Texas taxpayer dollars to purchase federal highways that Texas taxpayers paid to build and then charge Texans a toll to continue driving on them. According to my calculation, this equals triple taxation.

Thankfully, U.S. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison passed an amendment plac-

ing a one-year moratorium on TxDOT’s ability to enact this plan, but we are not out of danger yet. Hutchison’s amendment must survive a conference committee where numerous parties will try to remove it from the legislation before it becomes law.

The Solution
As we have in so many other circumstances, it is time for Texas citizens to step up and demand this unfair policy be stopped. Please contact your representatives in Washington, DC and ask them to support Senator Hutchison’s amendment, and when the state legislature re-convenes in January 2009, I will work with other members to permanently end this unfair policy statewide.

Senator Robert Nichols represents Texas Senate District 3. He is a retired engineer and former Texas Transportation Commissioner.

“*Heredity is what a man believes in until his son begins to behave like a delinquent.*”

Presbyterian Life

Letters/Continued from Page 6A

The students will be involved in many educational workshops that will enhance their leadership qualities, tours that will broaden their sense of responsibility in agricultural fields and student activities where they will have the opportunity to collaborate with other FFA members from all over the United States, Japan and Puerto Rico.

They will also have the chance to explore other cultures through their interaction with these foreign students. This will truly be a once in a lifetime opportunity for these students.

The students are working hard with hamburger sales, bake sales and raffle tickets but still need the help and support of our community and surrounding areas.

Any financial support that you could provide for these students in helping to reach their goal of

attending the national convention would be greatly appreciated.

Letters to editor criteria outlined

The Jasper Newsboy would like to publish your thoughts and concerns about issues that are important to you.

All Letters to the Editor should be accompanied with the writer’s name and daytime telephone number for verification purposes.

Phone numbers will not be published, but the author’s name will be.

Under no circumstances will the author’s

name be withheld.

All letters are subject to editing for newspaper style and clarity, without changing the meaning of the content.

Letters should be limited to 300 words.

Letters endorsing or opposing political candidates are considered political advertising and will be forwarded to the advertising department.

Deadline for letters is 10 a.m. Monday to be published in the following Wednesday’s publication.

Mail letters to:
The Jasper Newsboy
P.O. Box 1419 Jasper, Texas
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PUBLIC NOTICE

BRIEF EXPLANATORY STATEMENTS OF PROPOSED
CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS
SPECIAL ELECTION NOVEMBER 6, 2007

PROPOSITION 1 (HJR 103)

HJR 103 would update the constitutional reference to Angelo State University to conform with the statutory transfer of that institution from membership in the Texas State University System to membership in the Texas Tech University System.

The proposed amendment will appear on the ballot as follows: **“The constitutional amendment providing for the continuation of the constitutional appropriation for facilities and other capital items at Angelo State University on a change in the governance of the university.”**

PROPOSITION 2 (SJR 57)

SJR 57 would authorize the legislature to permit the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to issue up to \$500 million in general obligation bonds to finance educational loans to college and university students, and to enter into bond enhancement agreements.

The proposed amendment will appear on the ballot as follows: **“The constitutional amendment providing for the issuance of \$500 million in general obligation bonds to finance educational loans to students and authorizing bond enhancement agreements with respect to general obligation bonds issued for that purpose.”**

PROPOSITION 3 (HJR 40)

HJR 40 would authorize the legislature to limit the maximum appraised value of a residence homestead for property tax purposes in a tax year to the lesser of the most recent appraisal valuation, or 110 percent, or a greater percentage as determined by the legislature, of the appraised value in the preceding tax year.

The proposed amendment will appear on the ballot as follows: **“The constitutional amendment authorizing the legislature to provide that the maximum appraised value of a residence homestead for ad valorem taxation is limited to the lesser of the most recent market value of the residence homestead as determined by the appraisal entity or 110 percent, or a greater percentage, of the appraised value of the residence homestead for the preceding tax year.”**

PROPOSITION 4 (SJR 65)

SJR 65 would authorize the legislature to permit the Texas Public Finance Authority to issue up to \$1 billion in general obligation

bonds, the proceeds of which would be dedicated to maintenance, construction, repairs, and equipment purchases, as authorized by the legislature for the following state agencies: the Texas Building and Procurement Commission; the Parks and Wildlife Department; the Department of the Adjutant General; the Department of State Health Services; the Department of Aging and Disability Services; the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired; the Texas Youth Commission; the Texas Historical Commission; the Texas Department of Criminal Justice; the Texas School for the Deaf; and the Texas Department of Public Safety.

The proposed amendment will appear on the ballot as follows: **“The constitutional amendment authorizing the issuance of up to \$1 billion in bonds payable from the general revenues of the state for maintenance, improvement, repair, and construction projects and for the purchase of needed equipment.”**

PROPOSITION 5 (SJR 44)

SJR 44 would authorize the legislature to permit cities with a population of less than 10,000 to hold an election to allow the city to enter into an agreement with a property owner to temporarily freeze taxes on property either in or adjacent to an area approved for funding under the Downtown Revitalization Program or the Main Streets Improvements Program administered by the Department of Agriculture.

The proposed amendment will appear on the ballot as follows: **“The constitutional amendment authorizing the legislature to permit the voters of a municipality having a population of less than 10,000 to authorize the governing body of the municipality to enter into an agreement with an owner of real property in or adjacent to an area in the municipality that has been approved for funding under certain programs administered by the Texas Department of Agriculture under which the parties agree that all ad valorem taxes imposed on the owner’s property may not be increased for the first five tax years after the tax year in which the agreement is entered into.”**

PROPOSITION 6 (HJR 54)

HJR 54 would authorize the legislature to exempt from ad valorem tax one motor vehicle owned by an individual that is used by the individual for both business and personal use.

The proposed amendment will appear on the ballot as follows: **“The constitutional**

amendment authorizing the legislature to exempt from ad valorem taxation one motor vehicle owned by an individual and used in the course of the owner’s occupation or profession and also for personal activities of the owner.”

PROPOSITION 7 (HJR 30)

HJR 30 would allow a governmental entity to sell property acquired through eminent domain to its immediately previous owner at the original purchase price, if the public use of the property has been canceled, if no progress is made toward that public use by a prescribed deadline, or if the property is unnecessary to accomplish that public use.

The proposed amendment will appear on the ballot as follows: **“The constitutional amendment to allow governmental entities to sell property acquired through eminent domain back to the previous owners at the price the entities paid to acquire the property.”**

PROPOSITION 8 (HJR 72)

HJR 72 would clarify home equity loan procedures and protections and make conforming changes to the written disclosure provided to the borrower at the loan closing. The amendment would establish that the status of whether property is an agricultural homestead for the purpose of receiving homestead protection, would be determined by whether it was designated for agricultural use on the date of the loan closing. The amendment would provide that a declared state of emergency (e.g., following a natural disaster) would justify execution of a second home equity loan on the same property less than one year after the first home equity loan. It would provide that non-substantive omissions on a loan application would not affect the agreement. It would require a borrower to receive a copy of all executed loan documents, and a disclosure list of fees and costs at closing. It would prohibit the use of preprinted checks for the use of unsolicited loan advances to obtain a home equity line of credit.

The proposed amendment will appear on the ballot as follows: **“The constitutional amendment to clarify certain provisions relating to the making of a home equity loan and use of home equity loan proceeds.”**

PROPOSITION 9 (SJR 29)

SJR 29 would authorize the legislature to exempt all or part of the market value of the residence homesteads of veterans certified as having a service-connected 100 percent

disability rating. SJR 29 would also clarify the progression of property tax exemptions available to veterans who are less than 100 percent disabled.

The proposed amendment will appear on the ballot as follows: **“The constitutional amendment authorizing the legislature to exempt all or part of the residence homesteads of certain totally disabled veterans from ad valorem taxation and authorizing a change in the manner of determining the amount of the existing exemption from ad valorem taxation to which a disabled veteran is entitled.”**

PROPOSITION 10 (HJR 69)

HJR 69 would remove constitutional references to the former office of inspector of hides and animals.

The proposed amendment will appear on the ballot as follows: **“The constitutional amendment to abolish the constitutional authority for the office of inspector of hides and animals.”**

PROPOSITION 11 (HJR 19)

HJR 19 would require a vote taken in either house of the legislature to be recorded by record vote, if the vote was on final passage of a bill, other than local bills, a resolution proposing a constitutional amendment, or any other resolution that is not purely ceremonial. The record vote must be archived and available for public viewing on the Internet for at least two years.

The proposed amendment will appear on the ballot as follows: **“The constitutional amendment to require that a record vote be taken by a house of the legislature on final passage of any bill, other than certain local bills, of a resolution proposing or ratifying a constitutional amendment, or of any other nonceremonial resolution, and to provide for public access on the Internet to those record votes.”**

PROPOSITION 12 (SJR 64)

SJR 64 would authorize the Texas Transportation Commission to issue up to \$5 billion in general obligation bonds for highway improvement projects, the proceeds of which will be used to pay for projects, costs, and payments owed under related credit agreements.

The proposed amendment will appear on the ballot as follows: **“The constitutional amendment providing for the issuance of general obligation bonds by the Texas Transportation Commission in an amount not to exceed \$5 billion to provide funding for highway improvement projects.”**

PROPOSITION 13 (HJR 6)

HJR 6 would authorize the denial of bail to a person who violates conditions of release

in a family violence case and permit the legislature to authorize the denial of bail to a person who violates certain court orders in a family violence case.

The proposed amendment will appear on the ballot as follows: **“The constitutional amendment authorizing the denial of bail to a person who violates certain court orders or conditions of release in a felony or family violence case.”**

PROPOSITION 14 (HJR 36)

HJR 36 would limit a state justice or judge’s service to December 31st of the fourth year of the term if he/she is elected to all or part of a six year term, and reaches mandatory retirement age during the first four years of said term.

The proposed amendment will appear on the ballot as follows: **“The constitutional amendment permitting a justice or judge who reaches the mandatory retirement age while in office to serve the remainder of the justice’s or judge’s current term.”**

PROPOSITION 15 (HJR 90)

HJR 90 would require the legislature to establish the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas, and would provide for its management, duties, and powers. It would authorize the issuance of up to \$3 billion in general obligation bonds to be used for operations and grants for the purpose of scientific research of all forms of human cancer.

The proposed amendment will appear on the ballot as follows: **“The constitutional amendment requiring the creation of the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas and authorizing the issuance of up to \$3 billion in bonds payable from the general revenues of the state for research in Texas to find the causes of and cures for cancer.”**

PROPOSITION 16 (SJR 20)

SJR 20 would authorize the issuance of up to \$250 million in general obligation bonds by the Texas Water Development Board to provide financial assistance to economically distressed areas of the state to help provide adequate sewer and water supply services for residential use.

The proposed amendment will appear on the ballot as follows: **“The constitutional amendment providing for the issuance of additional general obligation bonds by the Texas Water Development Board in an amount not to exceed \$250 million to provide assistance to economically distressed areas.”**

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(Advertisement)

“Dream Killers”



I have been a dreamer since a small girl; some have been fulfilled and some I’m still waiting on. I love the story of Joseph the first born son of Jacob and Rachel, his brother Benjamin who was their last and youngest son and Jacob’s 10 older sons.

Before Benjamin was born, Joseph was his father’s favorite son and he made him a coat of many colors. This along with Joseph telling his dreams to his brothers brought on jealousy and hate. They were a family of shepherds and one day Jacob sent Joseph to look for his brothers; they saw him afar and plotted to kill him. They seized him, tore off his coat of any colors, and put him down in a pit. Rueben, spoke out first not to kill him and Judah another brother said we’ll sell him for 20 pieces of silver. To add to all this deceit, they took his coat dipped it in animal blood and took it back to their father. Jacob believed his son was dead. Joseph was taken to Egypt, sold to Potiphar and officer under the Pharaoh of the nation, and good behavior earned him the highest position in the household. Potiphar’s wife lied on Joseph, because he wouldn’t commit adultery with her and he was put into prison; while in prison Joseph’s behavior earned him a position of responsibility over other prisoners. He met the “Baker and the Butler” interpreted their dreams; told the Butler he would be restored and the Baker he would be killed. When the “Butler” left prison, he forgot about Joseph and he had to spend 2 more years in prison, but God has a way to juggle our memory.

Pharaoh had 2 dreams, one about 7 fat and 7 skinny cows, and the second one about 7 full ears and 7 thin ears of corn. The Butler thought about Joseph, and Pharaoh sent for him. Joseph told him that there would be 7 years of plenty, then 7 years of famine and that he needed to appoint someone to be over this. To Joseph’s surprise, the Pharaoh appointed him and many things were given to him including a wife and servants, and he was second in rule to Pharaoh in power.

The brothers with the exception of Benjamin, had to travel to Egypt to buy grain from the very one they plotted to kill; they didn’t recognize him but he knew them. Joseph never became bitter, but did things to test them to see if they had changed over the years, like putting the same money they paid for grain back in their bags, keeping Simeon as ransom until they brought Benjamin back, and putting his silver cup and money back in Benjamin’s bag to make them think that he had stolen it. Judah the one that said “let’s sell him” years ago found himself begging to save Benjamin; this moved Joseph and he revealed himself to his brothers.

He sent them back to Canaan with gifts for his father and invited them to come live in Egypt. The grace of God worked in this family through Joseph’s dreams for God to get the glory. Rom 8:28 Says *And we know that all things work together for good to them who love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.*

Let us pray, Lord give us wisdom not to tell our dreams to everyone, and maybe to no one but you Lord and in all things let us get an understanding. Don’t let us be “Dream Killers”, not let us repay no man evil for evil, but provide things honest in the sight of all men and let us live peaceably with everyone. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

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