

The Texas Legislature convened on February 14 and as expected it is moving at a snail's pace at the moment. First, we had to get the election of a new Speaker of the House taken care of. This was very contentious as the Republican caucus, the Governor and Lt. Governor wanted Representative David Cook elected as he was seen as rubber stamping the Governor's favorite project school vouchers. Instead, Representative Dustin Burrows from Lubbock was elected with the help of the Democratic caucus. While frustrating to the West Texas billionaires who helped fund a multi-million-dollar effort to defeat any Republican Representative from the last special sessions who helped defeat school vouchers there seemed to be a degree of joy from other West Texas Republicans many of whom are from very rural areas who see school vouchers as taking money away from public education which they depend on. We will see what effect this will have.

Next, the Republican caucus voted new rules for the House notably of which prevent any Democrat from being the chair of any committee. Democrats can only be vice chairs.

We are now waiting for Speaker Burrows to appoint the Chairmen of the various committees. It appears that this may not happen until March! Hundreds of bills have been pre-filed since November and are awaiting assignment to the appropriate committees to be heard. The governor wants this to occur sooner than later as the Senate has passed its School Voucher bill and has sent it to the House for action. None of this can be done until the Committee Chairs are appointed and the bill has gone to committee and testimony. There is still a great deal of opposition to vouchers that has to be overcome. In fact, none of the governor's priorities can be addressed until this is accomplished, meaning there will be no movement of any bills that we are interested in!

Presently there are over 100 bills that have been prefilled that are of interest to our military, veterans and dependents. Here is an overview of some of them:

## **Key Bills and Resolutions Thus Far in the House and Senate**

### **House Bill 153 – Veterans Treatment Court**

House Bill 2053 would expand the eligibility of service members and veterans to utilize the veteran's treatment court system.

### **House Bill 710 Occupational Licenses and Government Certifications**

House Bill 710 Would recognize certain occupational licenses and government certifications for veterans and spouses. As fee would be assessed.

### **House Bill 879 Licensing of veteran health care**

House Bill 879 would allow certain veterans who are/were health care providers to be licensed.

### **SB247 State Aid to certain counties**

SB247 Would give monetary aid to Counties that are disproportionately experiencing a loss of revenue due to veterans residing in the county who have disabilities and are exempt from certain taxation.

## **SB524 Exemptions for Veteran Owned businesses**

SB524 Exemptions would exempt certain businesses owned by veterans from the State Franchise Tax and certain filing fees.

## **Committee Hearings and Public Testimonies**

Once Committee assignments have been made bills will start being assigned to appropriate committees. At that point we will begin monitoring bills to see when they will be brought up in committee for testimony. Those that warrant our testimony will have it. I would invite any of our members to go with us to the capital to add MOAA support or opposition to any legislation before the committees.

## **Texas Legislature Online (TLO)**

If you are not familiar with it, I would encourage you to familiarize yourself with TLO. With it, you can see when the various House and Senate Committees are going to meet, what bills they will be considering that you may want to weigh in on and possibly testify for or against.