

## 2-1-17 County Judge's Article

### CAPITOL VISIT

I spent last Tuesday visiting at the capitol in Austin along with a number of other county judges and county officials making sure our state representatives and senators get off to a good start in this year's legislative session knowing what some of the priorities are for county governments, particularly rural counties.

We began the day with a work session at our Texas Association of Counties headquarters a couple of blocks from the capitol with several senators and representatives interacting with us on subjects of particular interest to us. One in particular that I would mention is Joe Pickett of El Paso, chairman of the House Transportation Committee talking to us about TXDOT, and road financing. We stressed to him our interest in another round of funds being allocated for county road projects like we had two sessions ago. We in Milam County were allocated about \$2.2 million back then and are just now completing those projects.

Commissioners Donald Shuffield and Jeff Muegge have also recently met with Terry Wilson, our new state representative, showing him pictures of some of the projects that have been completed here in the county and encouraged him to help us try to get some additional road funds allocated for counties this session.

Senator Eddie Lucio, Jr. from Brownsville, one of the three senior members of the senate address our morning session as well expressing his support for county government, explaining that in his earlier years he had been a county commissioner and that his dad had been a county employee and that now his son was serving as a state representative (Eddie Lucio III who was there with him). Among other things he expressed to us how vital faith and trust in God is to continued successful government.

Later in the morning Senator Lucio introduced us county officials on the floor of the senate and had those of us that were present in the senate gallery stand and be recognized. This was an honor for us to have him do that. There were a number of groups introduced that morning, interestingly the lieutenant governor Dan Patrick who presides over the senate postponed our introduction until last, even delaying it until after the routine reading of a large number of bills into the record which took quite a while. Then right before our introduction he walked out of the chamber rather than be present. To me this was a strong indication that our opposition to his proposed revenue cap legislation which seeks to limit Commissioner's Court's ability to raise county tax rates is being felt. (I've discussed this issue with you in an article or two recently.) So politics is in full swing at the capitol! Anyway we had some fun.

I had lunch with our State Rep. Terry Wilson and he came over to the late afternoon reception at the Association of Counties office to show his support for us and Texas counties. I also visited with him and his Chief of Staff Jeff Frazier in Suite E2 702. Their capitol phone is 512-463-0309. I believe our interests are going to be well served by Rep. Wilson and his staff.

In the afternoon I sat in for a while on the very influential Senate Finance Committee hearings on which our Senator Charles Schwertner serves to watch him in action along with Lois Kolkhorst from Brenham, also a friend of Milam County (having once served as our state rep and also a past owner of Rattlers here in Cameron). Dr. Schwertner is obviously a very influential member of that committee. I also stopped by his office in the capitol basement briefly (Suite E1 806, Phone-512-463-0105), Tom Holloway is his chief of staff.

I would encourage any of you that can find time to do so to stop by the capitol while the legislature is in session, visit our representatives' offices, and sit in on the senate and house chambers while they are in session, particularly if you have never had this experience before. It is very interesting and worthwhile. If our representatives are available they will visit with you; if not one of their staff members will be happy to spend a few minutes with you and answer any questions that you have.