

Just Vote No!

By Bill Hobby

Dear Texas legislator:

Congratulations on your recent election. The easy part is over.

Between now and the end of May, you will set the state's priorities for the next two years. You will consider thousands and pass hundreds of bills. The bill that really counts is the general appropriations bill. In that one bill you will decide how well Texans will be educated, regulated, imprisoned and medicated for the next two years.

Spend every nickel you can on education. Every nickel you don't spend now will cost dollars in the future for welfare and prisons.

Then go home. Please don't pass any more laws.

Specifically:

Anybody who wants to "amend the penal code by adding a new section to read as follows..." probably thinks they are "getting tough on crime" by creating another one. People have been passing laws for about 5,000 years now--ever since the Code of Hammurabi. If we could eliminate, or even reduce, crime by passing laws, we wouldn't have built new prisons in years. New laws in the penal code create new crimes and new criminals. We have enough criminals already, so

JUST VOTE NO.

Don't try to tell people what it is you don't want them to put into their minds or bodies. (See above.) Ungrateful louts that they are, they won't appreciate your advice, or even pay attention, so

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Whenever somebody wants to "reform" something, hold on to your purse or wallet tightly. What they really want to do is transfer money or power from some other group to their own group. Maybe that's all right. In fact, that's why legislatures meet every year or so--to change power and money relationships to fit the political realities of the day. But when somebody tells you they want to "reform" something, they are saying "Trust me." Just don't think they world is going to be a better place after it's "reformed"--or be disappointed when it isn't, so

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Somebody will probably want to "reform public schools" by "amending the Education Code by adding a new section to read as follows..." Nothing in the Education Code makes any difference in the classroom anyway, so give it as rest and

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Don't react to a tragedy by passing a law. Don't vote (as Congress did) to give the cops more power because a right-wing nut blew up the Federal Building in Oklahoma City. Don't vote to create "hate crimes," however heinous the deed. Such crimes are already first-degree offenses (murder, etc.,) and carry the heaviest penalties available, so

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Don't be silly. Don't decide how much water will flush a toilet, as Congress did a few years ago. Don't decide that the circumference of a circle is three times the diameter, as a legislature in the last century did. Don't decide that the Earth is only 4,000 years old, as legislatures have when they made monkeys of themselves by passing evolution laws. In short, don't make a fool of yourself,

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And, speaking of people making fools of themselves, please repeal the law against libeling cows. The Panhandle ranchers must have caught the Mad Cow disease just before they sued Oprah Winfrey, and legislators who passed the law certainly need a check-up.

Vote against the little stuff, too.

Seemingly harmless resolutions can be as bad as bills.

Nobody can sue the state of Texas in state court unless you vote to let them by passing a "resolution to sue the state." Any body who does business with the state knows that. These resolutions cost the state millions of dollars a year in needless legal costs and judgments. When you pass these resolutions, you are giving away the state's money. Would you waive your own immunity (statute of limitations, say) to let somebody sue you personally? You wouldn't give your own money away that way, so

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Legislators are forever introducing "memorial resolutions." These are not in honor of departed constituents but are resolutions "memorializing" Congress to do something or other. Nobody in Congress ever reads these things, nor is there any reason why they should. Somebody is trying to make you vote on some issue that is not before the Legislature. You can vote "present not voting" or,

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Legislative rules are set by resolution early in the session. The rules authorize the lieutenant governor and the House speaker to appoint legislators to committee chairmanships and other important positions on the basis of the legislator's effectiveness and experience, not on the basis of partisanship. Neither party has a patent on statesmanship or leadership. If somebody tries to amend the rules resolution to make the legislature more partisan, to make the Legislature look more like Congress,

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The problem is that it just plain feels good to get tough on crime, reform all sorts of things, mess around with the schools yet again, fight the war on drugs and so on. Especially if you borrow the money and don't have to pay for it. Maybe the best rule is:

If it feels good,

JUST VOTE NO.

But don't vote "No" on everything! Here are a few ideas that will reduce the size of state government and might save some money, too:

You have lightened the attorney general's workload by not letting people sue the state. Why not save even more money by privatizing the office? There are able lawyers

in the attorney general's office but the turnover rate is high. A lot of time is wasted because of the lack of continuity. Many agencies, particularly those outside Austin, will be better served by private counsel. appropriate money to each state agency for its legal expenses and let the agency decide whether to use the attorney general's office or a private law firm. Reduce the attorney general's appropriation accordingly. (How would you feel if you couldn't select your own lawyer for your own business?)

Make the loser pay all court costs and attorney fees, plus an insult charge to a successful defendant. Reduce judicial appropriations accordingly. Why should you and I foot the bill every time somebody goes to court to whine that it was somebody else's fault?

Remove the requirement that the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board approve every course offered by every state university and community college. Universities get paid by the number of students who take a course, so they don't teach courses that nobody wants. Hundreds of people, both at the Coordinating Board and the schools, now do this busy work that the law requires. And you are for local control, aren't you?

Abolish the state Securities Board. The federal government (Securities and Exchange Commission) regulates the securities business. We don't need two nannies.

This article was published in the Houston Chronicle and the Dallas Morning News on Jan. 3, 1999, the San Antonio Express-News on Jan. 10, 1999, and the Ft. Worth Star-Telegram in January 1999.