

SUBJECT: Naming a portion of Highway 290 the Ronald Reagan Memorial Highway

COMMITTEE: Transportation — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 6 ayes — Krusee, Phillips, Callegari, Casteel, Deshotel, Hill

0 nays

3 absent — Flores, Hamric, West

WITNESSES: None

BACKGROUND: Transportation Code, sec. 225.001 states that the Texas Transportation Commission may not designate a part of the highway system by the name of a person, organization, or event, or by a symbol other than the regular highway number. Sec. 225.002 authorizes local governments to assign a memorial or other identifying designation to a part of the highway system. Any other authority to assign a memorial to a part of the highway system lies with the Legislature. Under sec. 225.021, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) may accept a grant or donation to assist in financing the construction and maintenance of a marker.

DIGEST: CSHB 540 would designate the part of U.S. Highway 290 located in Harris County as the Ronald Reagan Memorial Highway. The bill would direct TxDOT to design and construct memorial markers indicating the highway number and the designation as the Ronald Reagan Memorial Highway and to erect such markers at each end of the highway and at appropriate intermediate sites along the highway. TxDOT would not be required to design, construct, or erect a marker with this highway designation unless it received a grant or donation to cover the cost.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2005.

SUPPORTERS SAY: In recognition of Ronald Reagan's statesmanship and leadership in national and world affairs and his public service to his beloved country, the Texas Legislature should honor him by naming a section of highway in his honor. Ronald Reagan served as the 40th President of the U.S. from 1981 through 1988, choosing as his running mate and Vice President

George H. W. Bush, a Houstonian and former Texas Congressman. Prior to his two terms as president, Reagan served with honor and distinction as governor of California. President Reagan was loved and admired by millions of Texans and Americans, inspiring their best hopes. This bill would allow the Legislature to recognize President Reagan's legacy.

In prior sessions, the Legislature has designated other sections of U.S. Highway 290 the 10th Mountain Division Memorial Highway, the Pearl Harbor Memorial Highway, and the Presidential Corridor in honor of Lyndon Baines Johnson and George H. W. Bush. The Legislature also has named a portion of two different Texas highways after Cesar Chavez, another national figure who was not a Texan. At least four other states with no direct connection to President Reagan — Alabama, Colorado, Florida, and Louisiana — have named state highways for him. There is no reason why Texas should not do the same.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

This bill would set a questionable precedent for the Legislature by naming a portion of a state highway for a non-Texan with no obvious ties to the state. President Reagan was not born in Texas, nor did he live in the state or spend any significant amount of time here. Given that Texas was the birthplace of two U.S. presidents (Dwight Eisenhower, Lyndon B. Johnson) and the adopted home state of two others (George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush), it would seem inappropriate to name a portion of a state highway for President Reagan or any president who lacks a strong connection to Texas.

NOTES:

The committee substitute differs from the introduced bill in requiring TxDOT to design, construct, or erect markers for the President Reagan highway only if it received sufficient grants or private donations.

HB 110 by Wong, which would name the circle drive around the State Capitol the Ronald Reagan Circle, has been referred to the State Affairs Committee. HB 539 by Bohac, which would name the same circle for George W. Bush, is pending in the State Affairs Committee. HB 55 by Grusendorf, et al, which would designate a portion of Interstate Highway 20 inside Dallas and Tarrant counties as the Ronald Reagan Memorial Highway, was reported favorably by the Transportation Committee on March 15. SB 499 by West, which would name the same portion of Interstate Highway 20 in Dallas and Tarrant Counties the President William Jefferson Clinton Highway, has been referred to the Senate Transportation and Homeland Security Committee.

