

OUR VIEW

Governor needs to sign TWIA reform legislation

The Texas Legislature last week approved a reasonable and mostly positive reform of the Texas Windstorm Insurance Association. We urge Gov. Greg Abbott to sign the bill into law.

Senate Bill 900 requires insurance companies to begin covering the costs of storm claims sooner in the association's layered funding scheme and seeks to set their total possible contribution at \$1 billion — a \$200 million increase.

This means insurance companies could be required to pitch in after less destructive hurricanes, rather than only after catastrophic events, which happen less often.

The industry and inland lawmakers fought the measure partly because it would put more hurricane expense on insurers, which they contend could mean higher premiums for property owners statewide. So it was a good day's work for Sen. Larry Taylor and state Rep. Greg Bonnen, both Friendswood Republicans, to have gotten the funding change past that formidable opposition.

One of the best ideas in the change is to incentivize insurance companies to write more coverage in riskier areas along the coast. The bill would do that by reducing a company's requirement to pay the post-storm assessments as the company writes more coastal windstorm coverage.

The new law also would allow private insurers to pick up association policies and offer comparable plans at no more than 115 percent the cost of a policyholder's current premium for three years. Policyholders could stay with their current agent if they choose to switch.

Those two changes are meant to encourage "depopulation" of the association, which is a five-dollar word for reducing the number of policies the association is carrying, and, with them, its risk exposure and possible financial liability.

Most of the problems the association has experienced, both financial and logistical, can be traced to the fact that it had rapidly evolved from being the insurer of last re-

sort to being the insurer of only resort for the people most likely to need windstorm insurance.

In 1995, the association was carrying slightly fewer than 70,000 policies. When Hurricane Ike hit in 2008, it was responsible for more than 215,000 policies. Most of that growth happened in the mid-2000s as insurance companies fled coastal areas in effort to escape the levels of liability blown in by storms such as Hurricane Katrina.

People who closely follow this issue have argued for years the best long-term solution for various problems facing the association was for private insurers to return to the coast. The industry has argued it was willing to do that, if it could make the financial numbers work.

It will be interesting to see whether these two depopulation carrots reduce the association's exposure, or whether lawmakers might also need to apply a stick.

One downside of the bill for coastal residents is that it reduces their representation on the association's governing board. Under the new law, coastal and inland areas and the insurance industry would each have three board seats. The board now has four industry representatives, four from the coast and one representing inland areas.

There's potential for problems in that new arrangement, given that the board can set premium rates, but doesn't strike us as enough to oppose it becoming law.

The bill also backs off a little on the notion of farming association's management out to a private contractor.

Language that will arrive on Abbott's desk says the state's insurance commissioner "may" choose to privatize association, rather than "shall" do so.

Association officials argue they operate cheaper and receive fewer complaints than the insurance industry average and we're not convinced that privatization would solve any problems. Maybe privatization is a better option, but proponents still need to prove that.

• Michael A. Smith

Don't fly it and forget it

Fly it and forget it is the current attitude toward the American Flag, Old Glory, the Stars & Stripes, the banner we salute and honor at ball games and special ceremonies. Today if Old Glory could speak, she would probably sound like Rodney Dangerfield, "I get no respect."

The 10th anniversary of 9/11 renewed patriotism. Documentaries remembered the fallen and events, snippets on news shows, and editorials from every talking-head newscaster. Politicians scurried for current event media weeklies, Sunday morning talk shows watched mostly by people in D.C.

After the tragedy of September 11, 2001, patriotism ran high, almost approaching a roar for revenge, a call to war, but with no traditional enemy. Almost immediately, red, white, and blue patriotic bumper stickers adorned every car to show a nation united. We mourned the dead, offered condolences to affected families, and praised rescuers who proudly were the first responders. We recall 9/11 annually and our flag is always

featured.

Every schoolkid knows some history of the flag, from the Pledge of Allegiance, (originally composed to mark Columbus Day), The Star Spangled Banner, Fort McHenry, Francis Scott Key, and from activities as a Boy Scout or Girl Scout. But not the real deep history: Flag Day was founded by Wisconsin schoolteacher, Bernard Cigrand, after a long campaign. Cigrand became known as the Father of Flag Day, though other community leaders ran similar campaigns. It was not celebrated nationally until President Wilson proclaimed June 14th as Flag Day in 1916; President Coolidge confirmed it in 1927. Congress made Flag Day law in 1949.

Guest column



Michael C. Jozwiak lives in Galveston.

Flag sales skyrocketed. Patriotism is now commercialized as businesses large and small fly the flag, understanding it to give their entity respect, testifying to American loyalty, hoping to attract customers. Our flag is neither a decoration nor an advertising gimmick.

Car dealers are the most ostentatious, flying dozens of flags and banners. Huge flagpoles tower over vehicles, hoisting an enormous Red White & Blue for the world to see. Many augment the high-flying flag with street level flags flying from light poles surrounding their lots. Used car lots are worse. They ring with flags from Canada to Argentina, courting immigrants, hoping not to offend, but to attract buyers. More greed, advertising.

Fly it and forget it is today's attitude.

Respect is gone. Flags wave tattered and torn, withered and dripping in rainstorms, fading in the sun, ripped by winds, tattered on fences and barbed wire, unlit at night. All displayed but ignored. Flown and forgotten. Is there a cure for over-commercialization and laziness?

The cure rests with those who put the flag out. They need to adhere to long-standing rules to respect our nation's banner, Old Glory. Protest? Mildly. Boycott? As you feel. Re-educate. Constantly. Instill the love and decry abuse of our Star Spangled Banner.

The flag honors the USA, the nation for which it stands, and those fallen in its defense and freedoms.

Loss of voting rights proposed 46 days before Juneteenth

Very soon many people in America will be celebrating Juneteenth and the symbolic end of slavery in America 150 years ago in Galveston.

Some of you may be aware the City Council appointed Charter Review Committee voted on May 4th to propose the city charter be changed from a 6-1 single member district election system to a 4-2-1 hybrid at-large system in Galveston. This is similar to what happened in Pasadena last year and is now in federal court.

Guest column



Cornelia Banks, Galveston Northside Taskforce, Leon Phillips, Galveston Coalition for Justice, Steve McIntyre and Joe Compian, Gulf Coast Interfaith, Mary Patrick, Galveston Chapter of the NAACP, and Amy Quiroga, LULAC Galveston Council No. 151.

Under the existing method of voting, minority voters currently have the ability to elect a candidate of choice in three of the six single-member districts. In contrast, this ability would exist only in two of four districts and in neither of the two at-large positions under the proposed system. Indeed, in the course of our investigation, the city acknowledged that the proposed method of election will decrease the number of minority ability-to-elect districts.

It is our understanding that under Sec. 2 of the Voting Rights Act there is a nationwide prohibition against not only election-related practices and procedures that are intended to be racially discriminatory, but also those that are shown to have a racially discriminatory result. The United States and private parties may file a lawsuit against a redistricting plan alleging that it violates Sec. 2.

Before our Juneteenth celebration begins you might read and consider a letter sent by local organizations to City Attorney Palumbo on August 22, 2013. You can find it online at http://gulfcoastinterfaith.org/yahoo_site_admin/assets/docs/CO_objection_to_changing_COG_to_421_election_system_42213.23573343.pdf

In the coming days as you participate in our local Juneteenth celebration activities, we hope everyone will reflect on whether the efforts of the Charter Review Committee and the City Council is any different from the three previous failed attempts to diminish the voting rights of the minority community in Galveston.

We hope thoughtful leaders of good faith and wisdom will reflect on what's going on.