

# Daily Record

## Bills target growth

By BRAD ROLLINS - Staff Reporter

Two bills being considered in the Texas Legislature would take dramatically different paths toward tempering some of the impact of rapid growth in Hays County.

Senate Bill 142, authored by Sen. Jeff Wentworth, a San Antonio Republican, would provide for a county election on whether to grant commissioners' courts the authority to require central water/wastewater systems, minimum fire suppression systems, roadway improvements, public space and charge impact fees.

Senate Bill 1838, authored by Sen. Gonzalo Barrientos, an Austin Democrat, would create a Hill Country Heritage and Conservation District, comprised of Hays County and portions of three other counties.

The legislation would grant a five-member, appointed board of directors the authority to administer the regulations.

Hays commissioners approved a resolution last week supporting Wentworth's and opposing the one by Barrientos.

The first, a majority of the court said, is a step toward reining in some of the excesses made possible by the short leash counties currently are on in regards to what aspects of growth they can regulate and what they can't.

The second, commissioners said, would amount to creation of a powerful bureaucracy overseen by appointees instead of elected officials.

"It's a bill that many of us would find very disturbing," environmental health director Allen G. Walther told the court. "It's basically a new level of government and it is an extreme departure from what authorities counties have now."

Commissioner Will Conley was even less guarded. "It makes me sick to my stomach," he said, adding in an interview later, "We don't need Austin elites to tell us how to run our county. The county, our municipalities and the people of Hays county can do just fine on our own."

Barrientos did not return a phone call seeking comment.

Commissioners praised the Wentworth alternative because it grants counties authorities they think counties need when beset with consistent growth.

"This would give us powers we've never had before and have always wanted," Commissioner Russ Molenaar said.

Wentworth said his bill would grant counties some of the authorities currently reserved for municipalities as dense development spreads across previously rural counties such as Hays.

"City-like conditions exist in unincorporated areas of the county," Wentworth said. "This is city-like powers to deal with city-like conditions."