



SENATOR PAUL BETTENCOURT

DISTRICT 7

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Harris County Taxpayer Protection Act Filed by Senator Whitmire, Joint Authored by Senator Bettencourt and 6 Others

***Protects taxpayers by letting the people vote on Astrodome modernization property tax expenditures
Lt. Gov. Patrick joined press conference, stating, "It's up to the people. It's their money"***

AUSTIN – Senator Paul Bettencourt (R-Houston) joined with Senator John Whitmire (D-Houston) this week to file Senate Bill 884, the Harris County Taxpayer Protection Act, which would require a public vote on an Astrodome refurbishment plan that uses property taxes, hotel and occupancy taxes (HOT), and rental taxes. County Judge Ed Emmett has proposed using \$105 million from the county's tax revenues, including \$35 million from the general revenue fund, which is made up largely of property tax revenue. Senator Whitmire said he filed the bill with the county facing flooding, a shortage of deputies, and roads still in disrepair, and to put in a solid safeguard that any public vote be honored. The county judge's plan is similar to the plan Harris County voters turned down in 2013, 53.5 percent to 46.5 percent, a seven-point rejection of a \$217 million bond issue.

"Instead of offering a much needed tax rate cut to hard-pressed Harris County taxpayers, who have seen average Harris County home property tax bills rise 36 percent in just three years, here comes another proposal to spend property tax monies on the Astrodome to enact a plan similar to the one voters rejected in 2013," said Senator Paul Bettencourt (R-Houston), one of the six joint authors on the bill. **"Let the people vote!"** he added.

Senator Bettencourt joint authored the bill with the following six Senators: Brandon Creighton (R-Conroe), Sylvia Garcia (D-Houston), Lois Kolkhorst (R-Brenham), Borris Miles (D-Houston), and Larry Taylor (R-Friendswood), who represent nearly the entire Harris County Senate delegation plus Senator Eddie Lucio (D-Brownsville).

Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick added his support for the bill and a public vote on the county's plan to use taxpayer dollars on the Astrodome, stating, **"It has been sitting there a long time and there has not been a private entity that has come forward with a viable plan. I always get little nervous when I see government stepping in to spend taxpayer money when the private sector has said, 'we don't see anything working.' Today's bill is about the rights of the taxpayers and does their vote count."** He added, **"It's up to the people. It's their money."**

Senator Garcia stated that while she loved the Astrodome and supported efforts to **"keep it alive,"** she did not think the county's plan was the way to do it. Senator Whitmire added, **"This is not about the facility, this is not about the future of the dome. This is about respecting the taxpayers' voice."**

Senator Whitmire, Dean of the Senate, concluded, **"You only have so many tax dollars, and if you're going to spend money like that, maybe the taxpayers might start wondering, 'Maybe you have too much, maybe rollback provisions do make more sense than other individuals think.' It's good government at its best, and it's respectful of the taxpayer's opinion."**

Senator Bettencourt quipped, **"I couldn't have said it any better than the Dean!"**

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