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★ DISTRICT 2 ★

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Raw Milk Bill Heard in Public Health Committee

Austin, TX - State Representative Dan Flynn (R-Van) received an ovation after a very long evening of testimony that went almost to midnight. The committee hearing saw approximately 100 witnesses in support of the Raw Milk Bill (HB 75); against little opposition from entrenched special interests and over regulating bureaucrats. Representative Flynn stated, "I want to thank Chairwoman Kolkhorst and her committee for holding this important hearing. Flynn went on to say that this bill does not legalize raw milk because raw milk is already legal. It has been legal in Texas for decades."

HB 75 is a very simple bill that only removes the restriction that raw milk must be sold on-the-farm, and allows licensed producers to sell directly to consumers at locations such as county fairs and farmers markets. The bill benefits "mom and pop" small businesses who comply with the law by removing unnecessary barriers that are entirely economic, with no health or safety benefits. Early negotiation clarified that limitations on place of sale do not include supermarkets and adds a reasonable labeling requirement. This is an important piece of legislation as it allows a mechanism to provide an improvement in safety and promotion of commerce and potentially increases jobs and income for the Citizens of Texas. Despite the extensive safety regulations, sales of raw milk have been limited by agency regulation to "the point of production, i.e. at the farm."

Much testimony was received by the committee on safety and the vast majority expressed the

safety of raw milk from Grade A Dairies and when pressed for data the opposition had little if any offering only that there had been 2 cases involving raw milk in 20 years. Testimony was also offered that the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) and Center for Disease Control's (CDC) own data suggested more problems with strawberries, macaroni salad and oysters. Most likely this is because currently, producers go through an extensive process to receive a "Grade A Raw for Retail" license, which permits them to sell raw milk directly to consumers. The Department of State Health Services' regulations govern testing for animal diseases, the structure of the milk barn, sanitation measures at every step, and regular testing of the milk. The regulatory standards for raw milk meet or exceed the state's regulatory standards for pasteurized milk. When and if there is a problem, the DSHS has proven that they can handle it quickly and appropriate based upon Texas law.

Overall, the bill is balanced and has broad based support. The fear mongering on the spread of disease and the wows of how bad it could be are not supported by any facts of large outbreaks or imminent danger from DSHS or the CDC. Representative Flynn stated, "Any opposition to the bill is based on generalized fears that are not supported by the data from Texas and on commercial interests seeking to maintain their market power. Nothing heard today is an appropriate justification for the State to interfere with individuals' right to purchase a product they desire from the producer."

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