

Now It Gets Really Interesting

“Having a good session?” is a common question around the Capitol these days. I hate it, though, because I’m too superstitious to tell them what I really think, afraid I’ll jinx it. So, I’m not really telling you this and you’re not really reading it but ... so far, so good.

The fact that no major insurance bills or any others have passed either the House or Senate is due to a slow startup in the House (new speaker, remember?) and the Senate having

shoved a bunch of legislation aside to take up the voter ID proposal. Two ways to read this: it’s great because deadlines are coming up soon for bills to get out of committee or to get passed on the floor; and if they’re not done by then, they’re dead. Or, more likely, it means lots of bills will be crammed into too short a time to be properly considered. Tensions increase. Tempers get shorter. Bar tabs get higher.

Two bills must pass: the budget and the TDI sunset bill which will reauthorize TDI. It’s that second one that has me re-thinking my “so far, so good” line. Sunset is intended to focus and fix a state agency’s structure and organization, not the public policy an agency administers. The good news is that both the Senate sponsor, Sen. Glenn Hegar from Katy, and House sponsor, Rep. Carl Isett from Lubbock, know this and are working to keep the TDI bill inside these parameters. But some legislators want to amend the sunset bill with their own pet ideas which are clearly changes in public policy. Those pet ideas often don’t get very far in the usual legislative process so tacking them onto the sunset bill is their next best opportunity.

Sen. Hegar is trying to get SB 1007 to the floor on Wednesday or Thursday. In the meantime, here are a few of the amendments which could come up:

- Sole proprietors permitted to have a small employer plan
- Study if a group participation rate of 60 per cent is feasible
- Make it next to impossible to cancel or rescind a policy due to material misstatements
- Impose minimum loss ratio requirements

These dandy ideas were just a few of the 40+ amendments that were laid out and then withdrawn last week when the committee took up the bill. Check out the senate video archives if you want to see the committee go through that procedural weirdness: <http://www.senate.state.tx.us/avarchive/ramav.php?ram=00004028> On the “Play” pull down menu, do a “seek to” at 56:00 to get to the TDI bill. The action on the amendments starts at 1:55:00.

If you agree these changes in public policy shouldn’t be in a sunset bill, call your state senator and tell him or her to vote for a “clean bill.”



Meantime, in Other Capitol News

If you dial up “SB 80” on the capitol web site (www.capitol.state.tx.us), here’s what you’ll see:

Description	Comment	Date	Time	Journal Page
S Reported engrossed		04/02/2009		

This entry means the bill, TAHU’s initiative on the 100% employer contribution option, passed the full Senate last Thursday and goes to the House of Representatives. No word on the timing but in theory, it should enjoy the same quick, successful trip through the House. In theory. The Senate passed another bill of interest to TAHU members on the same day: **SB 1143**, which provides for disclosure notices to employers to acquaint them with the possibility they will face some premium payments if terminated employees aren’t removed from their plan promptly. **Houston TAHU members Mike McLaughlin and Mark Kennedy** testified for SB 1143 when it was heard in the Senate State Affairs Committee.