

BYRON COOK: A CHAMPION FOR LIFE

There are many legislators to whom pro-life advocates owe a debt of gratitude for the numerous successes of the 84th Texas Legislature. Few, however, are more deserving than House State Affairs Committee Chair Byron Cook.

The House State Affairs Committee is one of the most critical committees to the success of the pro-life movement. Before any bill can be considered on the House floor, it must first be considered and approved by a committee, as required by the Texas Constitution and House rules.

The State Affairs Committee considers nearly all of the pro-life bills in the House, most of which are highly contentious and frequently attract formidable opposition.

During the special session of July 2013, for example, when Chairman Cook's committee held a public hearing on HB 2 (the extremely successful pro-life bill to ban late abortions and vastly increase safety standards at abortion clinics), more than 3400 opponents registered to testify against it, hoping to overwhelm the process through gross numbers.

Chairman Cook, the State Affairs Committee, and his small staff skillfully processed the unprecedented numbers of witnesses, *without error*. Each witness and the attending data provided multiple opportunities for error, any of which would have been fatal points of error. To anyone familiar with the committee process, Chairman Cook's dedication to passing the pro-life bill was more than evident.

As everyone knows, because Chairman Cook thwarted the opponents of HB 2, the Legislature was able to pass it, and the Governor was able to sign it into law. Consequently, HB 2 has stopped virtually all abortions after five months in Texas and shuttered half the abortion facilities that had been operating for years at substandard safety levels, putting the health and safety of women at risk.

During the most recent session, Chairman Cook and his committee succeeded in passing out HB 3074, a bill to give patients near the end of life the right to food and water--thus protecting patients from a cruel death by starvation and dehydration—while providing conscience protections to medical providers from having to provide futile treatments that inflict unnecessary pain, which had proved elusive for more than a decade.

Under his leadership, Chairman Cook's committee passed a number of other significant pro-life bills this past session, as well. The Committee passed out HB 3994, which strengthened judicial bypass procedures for minor girls seeking court permission for a secret abortion, which improved parental rights and will further reduce the numbers of abortions on minors in Texas.

Chairman Cook's committee also passed HB 416 to protect women at abortion facilities from sex trafficking, the only bill of its kind in the nation. The Committee also passed out several more pro-life bills, some of which made it to the Governor's desk while others did not.

Twice his committee passed bills to ban abortion coverage in health insurance, but they did not successfully pass the house for procedural reasons. This does not diminish the fact that Chairman Byron Cook is committed to the life issue, and doing everything possible to protect mothers and their unborn children from the tragedy of abortion.

As a true statesman, Chairman Byron Cook demonstrated incredible leadership in the Texas House of Representatives in helping craft the strongest possible anti-abortion legislation, calling together negotiations and meetings to ensure that we had the votes to pass critical pro-life bills.

Chairman Cook knows well the truth behind the old legislative saw that there is one way to pass a bill and a thousand ways to kill it, and one of the surest ways to kill it is warring factions in the lobby. That is exactly why he worked so closely with GOP Caucus Chairman Tan Parker behind the scenes to negotiate between our various pro-life groups to achieve a fair and effective consensus.

In fact, Chairman Tan Parker agrees that, "Byron Cook is committed to passing pro-life legislation and the results of his work are clear with the passage of end of life reforms and one of the best judicial bypass bills in the nation during the 84th Session."

Chairman Cook also ensured that a record number of pro-life bills were heard in his committee, and as always, he and his team worked hard behind the scenes to ensure that these bills wouldn't die to points of order on the House floor.

It is Byron Cook's Christian decency and unwavering commitment to protecting life that makes recent unwarranted criticisms by some organizations so dishonest. Pro-life groups only diminish their voice when they lose sight of the goal of preserving human life and instead attack our legislative champions amid petty political gamesmanship.

Chairman Cook has been with pro-lifers from the beginning and continues to fight for our priorities. His humility sets him apart as most of his tireless pro-life efforts are behind the scenes rather than in the spotlight. God bless, and thank you, Chairman Byron Cook.



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