

SUBJECT: Port Freeport name change from Brazos River Harbor Navigation District

COMMITTEE: Government Reform — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 5 ayes — Callegari, Berman, Leibowitz, Rodriguez, W. Smith

0 nays

2 absent — Pitts, Miles

WITNESSES: No public hearing

BACKGROUND: The port facility now known as Port Freeport was established in 1889 with the completion of the jetty system on the Upper Gulf Coast near the mouth of the Brazos River in Brazoria County about 60 miles south of Houston. During its first called session in 1927, the 40th Legislature created the Brazos River Harbor Navigation District of Brazoria County to administer the port and surrounding navigation district.

According to the Army Corps of Engineers, Port Freeport ranks 13th among U.S. ports in international tonnage handled and 23rd in total domestic and foreign tonnage with a total of 33.9 million tons.

DIGEST: HB 542 would amend Chapter 55, Acts of the 40th Legislature, 1st Called Session, 1927, to change the name of the Brazos River Harbor Navigation District of Brazoria County to Port Freeport and change all references in state law to Port Freeport. Also, the bill would change the name of the governing body to the Port Commission and rename members as Port Commissioners.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2007.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 542 officially would change the name of the Brazos River Harbor Navigation District of Brazoria County to Port Freeport. Those who use and administer the port already refer to the navigation district as “Port Freeport,” which is also the name that appears in the port’s marketing

program. The bill merely would conform references in state law to this established practice.

The name change also would help clarify a point of confusion about the port's identity in time for an upcoming bond election. A primary reason that navigation district voters rejected a \$50 million bond proposal last November is that the ballot referred to "Brazos River Harbor Navigation District" bonds rather than "Port Freeport" bonds. Expedited consideration of this legislation — which typically would be included on a Local and Consent calendar — is necessary because the name change must be enacted before March 12 so that the navigation district board can call a Port Freeport bond election for May 12.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

No apparent opposition.

NOTES:

On February 26, the House by 130-0 suspended Art. 3, sec. 5(b), the constitutional order-of-business provision, to allow consideration of HB 542 during the second 30 days of the regular session.

The companion bill, SB 187 by Janek, is scheduled to be considered by the Senate Natural Resources Committee in a public hearing on March 1.