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Armbrister files new water bills

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Thursday, June 23, 2005

Sen. Ken Armbrister of Victoria is asking Gov. Rick Perry to open up the just-convened special session of the Legislature to water issues.

"Ken has visited with the governor's office and the lieutenant governor's office," Mike Sizemore, Armbrister's press secretary, said Wednesday afternoon. "We were told, 'Get your bills ready.'"

So Armbrister, chairman of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources, has done just that.

On Tuesday, he filed Senate Bill 15, legislation that would, for the first time, set aside flows in Texas rivers for the environmental needs of the state's bays and estuaries.

On Wednesday, he filed Senate Bill 24, which deals with the management of the Edwards Aquifer, the primary water supply for San Antonio and a major source of flows for the Guadalupe River.

Sizemore explained that the water-related bills can be filed and heard in committee, even though the special session hasn't been opened to water issues.

"You just can't pass them until they open the call (to water issues)," Sizemore said.

Sizemore said if lawmakers this week refer Armbrister's bills to his Natural Resources Committee, a committee hearing could be scheduled as early as Monday.

Sizemore said Armbrister's Senate Bill 3, which ran aground during the regular session, included provisions concerning both environmental flows and Edwards Aquifer management.

"These are issues that should have passed and have support, but for a variety of reasons, time ran out (during the regular session) and they didn't pass. But these two articles can hopefully be addressed during the special session."

The environmental flows legislation in particular had a lot of support during the regular session, he said.

"Environmental flows are really critical to bays and estuaries," Sizemore said.

The Legislature on Tuesday opened a 30-day special session on the sole topic of school finance.

But Armbrister's press secretary said the senator is "hopeful and anticipates that Gov. Perry would open the session to water issues."