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If you get an unsolicited call from someone who claims to be from the SSA, get off the phone. Then call the real SSA at 1-800-772-1213. Or, if you've detected a scam, file an online complaint with the FTC at www.ftc.gov/complaint or with the Texas attorney general's office at <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/cpd/file-a-consumer-complaint>.

...Texas State Parks System

(Continued from page 5)

All existing park reservations have been moved into the new system and are secure. Any customers experiencing issues may contact the Customer Service Center at (512) 389-8900. However, in the early days of the improved system, Customer Service Center wait times are expected to be longer than normal due to increased demand.

For more information about the system, or to make a reservation to a Texas State Park, visit texasstateparks.org/reservations.

Texas farmers, landowners seek eminent domain reform

A pair of bills that seek to reform the private entity use of the eminent domain process in Texas were filed in mid-January, and they have the support of Texas farmers, ranchers and rural landowners.

"Right now, the eminent domain process is very one-sided. Landowners are often left in the dark on the details of the project that will cross their land," John Ross Copeland, Coke County Farm Bureau president, said.

"That's why landowners are asking for reform this legislative session," John Ross Copeland said.

HB 991 and SB 421, the companion bills filed by Rep. DeWayne Burns (R-Cleburne) and Sen. Lois Kolkhorst (R-Brenham), outline changes to state law on how private entities with eminent domain authority must negotiate to acquire property before resorting to condemnation.

The bills would mandate that all easement agreements used for pipelines or electric transmission lines include minimum protections for landowners. They call for standardized easement forms that include a maximum number of pipelines, easement rights, how the entity will access the easement, prohibit transfer of the easement and more.

A provision regarding the use of and repair of any gates and fences is also included.

Private companies that use eminent domain would be required to hold public meetings within the counties they would be asserting eminent domain. These meetings must be held before the company can acquire any property.

There would also be consequences for making an initial offer that is below market

value.

If damages awarded by the special commissioners are 25 to 100 percent greater than the initial offer, then the companies would have to make an additional payment to the property owner of up to 35 percent of the special commissioners' award.

"Both urban and rural landowners deserve fairness, transparency and accountability in the eminent domain process," John Ross said. "Oftentimes, private entities offer less than fair market value. These bills could reform the process and allow landowners to be treated more like an equal partner in the transaction."

Texas Farm Bureau and other agricultural organizations and landowner groups support the proposed legislation.

"We understand the need for eminent domain. We're not against progress," John Ross said. "We just want fair, transparent and honest dealings. Texas farmers, ranchers and property owners have a constitutional right to fair treatment and just compensation."

Visit texasfarmbureau.org/eminentdomain for more information.

Make sure all Passengers are always Buckled Up!

A good way to show your love is by making sure that before you start your vehicle, all passengers — big and small — are always buckled up correctly. Taking those few seconds to buckle your children into their car seats, and making sure older children and adults are buckled up, is the most crucial step you can take to protect those you love in a crash. Those few seconds can save your family and friends from having to go through a needless tragedy.

Fortunately, most Texans now buckle up, but some groups of motorists continue not taking the message to heart by not consistently using their seat belts. And, unfortunately, most children are not correctly restrained in a

car seat.

Here are some interesting things you may not know about buckling up that could help keep your family and friends safe:

Most crashes happen close to home. Therefore, buckling up is important on every trip — not just on long highway trips. Going around the corner to the grocery store is not an excuse to take a chance on not buckling up. In fact, most children are killed close to home.

Children should ride in the back seat until they reach the age of 13. Until a child reaches age 13, their bones are not fully developed. They do not have a mature skeleton that can take the forces of the most common type of car crash, which is a frontal crash. Placing a child whose bones are not yet strong enough in the front seat, where there is the windshield, dashboard, and air bags, puts them at greater risk of injury or death during a crash.

Pickup trucks, while big and strong, are twice as likely to rollover in a crash due to their higher center of gravity. Wearing a seat belt reduces the risk of dying in a crash up to 60 percent in a pickup truck. Sadly, the seat belt use rate for pickup truck drivers and passengers is lower than in passenger vehicles. It is important to always make sure that the driver and every passenger in a pickup truck is buckled up.

Buckling up is not just for the daytime. Between 6 pm and 6 am is when more crashes and fatalities happen. Crash stats from the Texas Department of Transportation show that the majority (57 percent) of fatal crashes in Texas happen at night. In 2017, of all Texas crashes in which people died and weren't wearing a seat belt, 57 percent occurred at night. It is important to wear your seat belt, day and night, to be protected in the event of a crash.

Unbuckled passengers are also dangerous to others in the

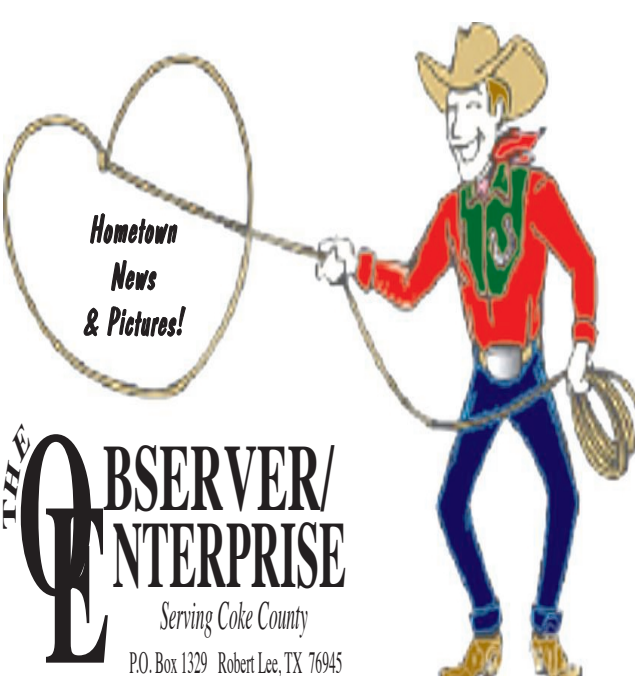
vehicle. In the event of a crash, the unbuckled passenger becomes a large projectile flying around the vehicle, who can injure or kill other occupants in the vehicle — including those who are buckled up!

In 2016 alone, seat belts saved an estimated 14,668 lives and could have saved an additional

2,456 people if they had been wearing a seat belt. That's why Milissa Wright, Concho Valley Health Agent for Coke, Concho, Menard and Sterling Counties County, is urging you to make sure all of those you love are safely buckled up every time, on every trip! Remember: If you love it, click it!

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