

Weekly Legislative Report

3.4.21



GOVERNOR:

On February 24, Governor Greg Abbott delivered a televised statewide address on the state's response to recent power outages caused by the severe winter weather as well as the actions the state is taking to ensure the reliability of Texas' power infrastructure.

The speech was given from the State Emergency Operations Center. Governor Abbott said, "Tragic does not even begin to describe the devastation and the suffering that you have endured over the past week. Too many of you were shivering in your own homes with no power, no heat, and no water. I want to thank the countless Texans who stepped up to help those in need. As is often the case in Texas, the worst of events brings out the best in Texans. For those of you still hurting, I want you to know that the state is using every resource to fix this problem. Many of you are angry. You have every right to be. I'm angry too. At a time when essential services were needed the most, the system broke. You deserve answers. You will get those answers."

ERCOT

"The Electric Reliability Council of Texas, known as ERCOT, manages the flow of power in Texas. Before the storm hit, ERCOT repeatedly assured the state and the public that ERCOT was prepared. Those assurances turned out to be false. We now know that power generators of all sources were not prepared for this severe winter weather. We have also learned that ERCOT operators should have acted quicker to stabilize the grid and to prevent power generators from being knocked offline. Our task now is to take the lessons of the past week and the anger that we all feel and channel them into immediate action."

Response to the Storm

"I made responding to this storm an emergency item this legislative session. I am already working on solutions with the lieutenant governor, the speaker, and the legislature.

"First is protecting you. It is outrageous for residents to be saddled with skyrocketing power bills. The state is already investigating multiple electric providers about these spikes. Also, we have ordered that Texans will not have their power shut off because of unpaid bills until the legislature has time to act on this.

"Second, ERCOT must be overhauled. Five ERCOT board members have already resigned, including the Chair and Vice-Chair. But more must be done. Tomorrow, the legislature begins comprehensive investigations of ERCOT. I am already working with the legislature on reforms to add more power to the grid and to ensure that we never run out of power again. Also, the Office of the Attorney General has launched a formal investigation into ERCOT.

"Third, the fact is, power generation from all sources buckled under the harsh, freezing winter weather. That includes natural gas, coal, nuclear, as well as wind and solar. Each of these power sources failed to fully produce because of inadequate safeguards. That is why I have made it a legislative priority to mandate and to fund the winterization of the Texas power infrastructure. This will protect our power grid from future winter weather events."

Conclusion

“No words can fix what happened or ease the pain that you endured. But I assure you this—this legislative session will not end until we fix these problems.

“And we will ensure that the tragic events of the past week are never repeated. Your safety is my top concern. I pray that God continues to bless you all.”

SENATE:

The Texas Senate was in session on Tuesday last week.

Lt. Governor Dan Patrick’s Legislative Priorities

On February 23, Lt. Governor Dan Patrick announced his top priorities for the 2021 Legislative Session. The list reflects his own priorities as well as priorities from senators and Texans around the state. The lieutenant governor’s priorities are designed to protect taxpayers and the Texas economy as it rebuilds following the pandemic and to secure Texas’ future, including addressing power failures in the recent winter storm. As always, the legislation he is championing also includes continued support for life, liberty, and conservative Texas values.

Lt. Governor Patrick said, “Since the legislature adjourned in 2019, Texas has faced some of the greatest challenges in our history. In fact, several of my priority bills changed in the last few days in response to issues that emerged from the winter storm last week. I have also prioritized legislation that reflects the principles and values of the Texas conservative majority. I am confident these priorities address issues that are critical to Texans at this time. In addition to these priorities, there are other bills that also have my strong support including the Medical Compensation Transparency Act (paid or incurred) and additional legislation to stop human trafficking. I also support the legislative proposal to review statewide health data in light of the pandemic and proposed legislation that will speed the recovery of the restaurant industry, including maintaining ‘liquor-to-go.’ I support the priorities laid out by Governor Greg Abbott as well as other legislation to make sure the Texas economy continues to come back stronger than ever following the pandemic. I will be working to make sure this legislation passes and that we do all that we can to make our state, our cities, and all our communities safe and secure going forward.”

Priority Bills by Number:

- Senate Bill 1 – The State Budget
- Senate Bill 2 – ERCOT Reform
- Senate Bill 3 – Power Grid Stability
- Senate Bill 4 – Star Spangled Banner Protection Act
- Senate Bill 5 – Statewide Broadband Access
- Senate Bill 6 – Pandemic Liability Protection Act
- Senate Bill 7 – Election & Ballot Security
- Senate Bill 8 – The Heartbeat Bill
- Senate Bill 9 – Abortion Ban Trigger
- Senate Bill 10 – Stop Taxpayer Funded Lobbying
- Senate Bill 11 – Appellate Court Reorganization
- Senate Bill 12 – Protect Free Speech on Social Media
- Senate Bill 13 – Oil & Gas Investment Protection
- Senate Bill 14 – Business Freedom and Uniformity Act

- Senate Bill 15 – Ban Sale of Personal Data from Certain State Agencies
- Senate Bill 16 – Protect State-held Personal Data
- Senate Bill 17 – Protect Texas Trucking
- Senate Bill 18 – Protect Second Amendment Businesses
- Senate Bill 19 – Stop Corporate Gun Boycotts
- Senate Bill 20 – Second Amendment Protections for Travelers
- Senate Bill 21 – Bail Reform
- Senate Bill 22 – First Responders Pandemic Care Act
- Senate Bill 23 – Stop Local Police Defunding
- Senate Bill 24 – Law Enforcement Transparency Act
- Senate Bill 25 – Family Nursing Home Visitation Rights
- Senate Bill 26 – Protect Our Freedom to Worship
- Senate Bill 27 – Expanding Virtual Learning Options
- Senate Bill 28 – Charter School Equity Act
- Senate Bill 29 – Fair Sports for Women & Girls
- Senate Bill 30 – Remove Racist Restrictions from Real Estate Deeds
- Senate Bill 31 – Senate Redistricting Act

A Safe & Secure Texas Future:

- Senate Bill 2 – ERCOT Reform
- Senate Bill 3 – Power Grid Stability
- Senate Bill 5 – Statewide Broadband Access
- Senate Bill 7 – Election & Ballot Security
- Senate Bill 15 – Ban Sale of Personal Data from Certain State Agencies
- Senate Bill 16 – Protect State-held Personal Data
- Senate Bill 21 – Bail Reform
- Senate Bill 22 – First Responders Pandemic Care Act
- Senate Bill 23 – Stop Local Police Defunding
- Senate Bill 24 – Law Enforcement Transparency Act
- Senate Bill 27 – Expand Virtual Learning Options
- Senate Bill 28 – Charter School Equity Act

Life, Liberty, and Conservative Texas Values:

- Senate Bill 4 – Star Spangled Banner Protection Act
- Senate Bill 8 – The Heartbeat Bill
- Senate Bill 9 – Abortion Ban Trigger
- Senate Bill 12 – Protect Free Speech on Social Media
- Senate Bill 18 – Protect Second Amendment Businesses
- Senate Bill 19 – Stop Corporate Gun Boycotts
- Senate Bill 20 – Second Amendment Protections for Travelers
- Senate Bill 25 – Family Nursing Home Visitation Rights
- Senate Bill 26 – Protect Our Freedom to Worship
- Senate Bill 29 – Fair Sports for Women & Girls
- Senate Bill 30 – Removing Racist Restrictions from Real Estate Deeds

Protecting Taxpayers & the Texas Economy:

- Senate Bill 1 – State Budget
- Senate Bill 6 – Pandemic Liability Protection Act

- Senate Bill 10 – Stop Taxpayer Funded Lobbying
- Senate Bill 13 – Oil and Gas Investment Protection
- Senate Bill 14 – Business Freedom & Uniformity Act
- Senate Bill 17 – Protect Texas Trucking

This Week: The Senate reconvened on Tuesday, March 2, 2021, at 3:00 p.m.

HOUSE:

The House was in session on Tuesday and Wednesday last week.

House District 68

In the February 23, 2021, Special Election Run-off, David Spiller (R-Jacksboro), attorney and Jacksboro ISD board member, defeated Craig Carter (R-Nocona), owner of Old Boot Company. Spiller will replace former State Representative, now Senator Drew Springer (R-Muenster). Here are the results:

- Craig Carter (R-Nocona) – 2,452 votes – 37.1 percent
- **David Spiller** (R-Jacksboro) – 4,158 votes – 62.9 percent

House Committee Schedule

The House announced its permanent committee schedule and locations:

Mondays:

8:30 a.m. – Appropriations Committee – E1.030
 10:00 a.m. – Defense and Veterans' Affairs Committee – E2.028
 10:00 a.m. – Juvenile Justice & Family Issues Committee – E2.014
 10:00 a.m. – Ways & Means Committee – JHR 140
 2:00 p.m. – Criminal Justice Committee – E2.010
 2:00 p.m. - Culture, Recreation & Tourism Committee – E2.036
 2:00 p.m. – Energy Resources Committee – JHR 120
 2:00 p.m. – Environmental Regulation Committee – E1.026

Tuesdays:

8:00 a.m. – Business & Industry Committee – E2.028
 8:00 a.m. – Human Services Committee – E2.030
 8:00 a.m. – Land & Resource Management Committee – E2.010
 8:00 a.m. – Natural Resources Committee – JHR 120
 8:00 a.m. – Public Education Committee – E1.004/JHR 140
 10:30 a.m. – Insurance Committee – E2.014
 2:00 p.m. – Transportation Committee – E1.004/HJR 140

Wednesdays:

8:00 a.m. – Corrections Committee – E2.026
 8:00 a.m. – International Relations & Economic Development Committee – E2.012
 8:00 a.m. – Judiciary & Civil Jurisprudence Committee – E2.014
 8:00 a.m. – Pensions, Investments & Financial Services Committee – E2.036
 8:00 a.m. – Public Health Committee – JHR 140
 10:30 a.m. – Licensing & Administrative Procedures Committee – JHR 120
 10:30 a.m. – Urban Affairs Committee – E1.026

Thursdays:

8:00 a.m. – Agriculture & Livestock Committee – E2.010

8:00 a.m. – Elections Committee – E2.028

8:00 a.m. – Higher Education Committee – JHR 120

8:00 a.m. – State Affairs Committee – E1.004/JHR 140

10:30 a.m. – County Affairs Committee – E2.014

10:30 a.m. – Homeland Security & Public Safety Committee – E2.030

2:00 p.m. – Redistricting Committee – E1.004

This Week: The House reconvened on Tuesday, March 2, 2021, at 2:00 p.m. Speaker Phelan announced that the House will be in session on Tuesday and Wednesday this week. He instructed all committees to have an organizational meeting this week if they have not already had one.

DSHS WEEKLY VACCINE DISTRIBUTION UPDATE:

On February 19, the Department of State Health Services issued its weekly update on vaccine distribution in Texas for the week of February 22. It said, “As Texas thaws from the winter storms, COVID-19 vaccine will again be distributed across the state in larger amounts. Texas providers have been allocated 591,920 first doses (compared to 407,650 first doses the week of February 12) of COVID-19 vaccine from the federal government for the week of February 22.

“The Texas Department of State Health Services has instructed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to ship those doses to 563 providers (compared to 302) in 230 counties (158 counties last week) across Texas, including 84,240 doses for large vaccine clinics in Harris, Dallas and Tarrant counties supported by the federal government. *(Note: One-half of the additional doses are going to the three super sites that were supposed to open last week but ended up as water distribution sites instead of vaccine sites.)*

“The added first doses directed to the federal sites over the next three weeks will allow Texas to allocate additional doses to communities where vaccine supplies have been much more limited, leading to vaccine distribution to the largest number of counties of any week so far. In addition to the first doses mentioned above, the state is ordering 516,830 doses intended as the second dose for people first vaccinated a few weeks ago. People who had second dose appointments delayed by winter weather should rest assured knowing that vaccine will be available, and their appointments will be rescheduled. Even if they receive the second dose outside of the recommended six-week time frame, they will get the full protection of the second dose and will not need an additional booster shot. Here is some additional information provided:

- The federal vaccine tracking system shows more than 100,000 first doses and 300,000 second doses intended for delivery last week still awaiting shipment due to weather conditions around out-of-state warehouses and across the country. Those doses are expected to be delivered in the first half of this week, followed by the vaccine allocated for this week.
- Texas providers have administered more than 4.3 million doses of vaccine. More than 3 million people have received at least one dose, and almost 1.3 million have been fully vaccinated.
- Texas continues to vaccinate health care workers, residents of long-term care facilities, people 65 and older, and those with medical conditions that put them at greater risk of hospitalization and death from COVID-19.

- Vaccine remains limited based on the capacity of the manufacturers to produce it, so it will take time for Texas to receive enough vaccine for all the people in the priority populations who want to be vaccinated.
- Per a recent label change, each vial of Pfizer vaccine now contains six doses leading to a minimum order of 1,170.