

Weekly Legislative Report

4.8.21



GOVERNOR:

Public Utility Commissioner Appointed

On April 1st, Governor Greg Abbott appointed Will McAdams to the Public Utility Commission of Texas (PUC) for a term set to expire September 1, 2025. The PUC regulates the state's electric, telecommunication, and water and sewer utilities, implements respective legislation, and offers customer assistance in resolving consumer complaints. Governor Abbott said, "Will McAdams will bring a fresh perspective and outstanding leadership to the Public Utility Commission of Texas. Will's wealth of experience in public service and state government make him the ideal leader to carry out the PUC's mission to protect customers, foster competition, and promote high quality infrastructure across Texas. Will is committed to charting a new course for the commission and restoring trust with Texans. I am confident that he will lead the agency with integrity and transparency and I urge the Senate to confirm Will's appointment."

Will McAdams is President of the Associated Builders and Contractors of Texas. Before joining ABC of Texas, Will served for over 10 years in state government most recently as Advisor to Speaker Dennis Bonnen for Business and Regulated Industries. Prior to joining the Speaker's Staff, Will served in several senior staff positions within the Texas Senate. These included serving as the Director for the Senate Committee on Business and Commerce Chaired by Senator Kelly Hancock (R-North Richland Hills). Will has also served as Legislative Director for Senator Charles Schwertner (R-Georgetown), and as Deputy Director for the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Legislative and Media Relations Director for State Senator Troy Fraser (R-Horseshoe Bay). Before working in the State Capitol, Will served as an infantry officer for four years in the United States Army and retired honorably as a captain. He is a graduate of Texas A&M University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Political Science.

Expanding Broadband Access

On March 29th, Governor Greg Abbott held a press conference at Hamshire-Fannett Elementary School in Beaumont on expanding broadband access across Texas. The governor was joined by Speaker Dade Phelan, Representative Trent Ashby, and Hamshire-Fannett ISD Superintendent Dwaine Augustine to discuss the importance of reliable broadband for education, business, and health care. Representative Ashby is the author of broadband legislation in the House that would create a state broadband office and a comprehensive broadband plan for Texas. Earlier this year, the governor named broadband access as an emergency item for the 87th legislative session. Governor Abbott said, "Broadband access is no longer a luxury, it is an essential tool for all Texans. Schools need broadband to connect with students, businesses need it to remain competitive, and our doctors and nurses and their patients need it for telemedicine purposes. The importance of closing the digital divide has never been more clear, and I look forward to working with Speaker Phelan, Representative Ashby, and the rest of the Legislature to expand broadband access to all Texans."

Crisis at the Border

On March 30th, Governor Greg Abbott sent a letter to Vice President Kamala Harris demanding answers and swift action from the Biden Administration to address the ongoing humanitarian

crisis at the border. In the letter, the Governor also urges Vice President Harris to visit the border to see the crisis for herself. The governor urged the administration to interview every unaccompanied minor coming across the border to determine if any child has been harmed, groomed, or victimized by human traffickers in any way. Governor Abbott demanded that Vice President Harris and the Biden Administration make clear what they are doing to prosecute human traffickers and address the surge in border crossings. Governor Abbott said, "Now that President Biden has named you Border Czar in charge of the administration's response, I want to express to you the threats and challenges caused by this administration's open border policies. These policies embolden and enrich cartels, smugglers, and human traffickers who continue to ramp up their criminal operations. Given your new role as the administration's Border Czar, I urge you to visit the border to see the crisis for yourself, and I implore the Biden administration to take swift action to secure the border, crack down on human trafficking, and prevent more children from being trafficked and abused." In the letter to Vice President Harris, the Governor again laid out several questions for the Biden Administration that have continued to go unanswered:

- Who is assisting these children as they travel through Mexico and cross the U.S. border?
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Mayorkas has acknowledged that many of these children have been abused or harmed during their journeys. What is the administration doing to eliminate that harm?
- Were these children forced to carry contraband into the United States?
- Were these children or their families assisted, coerced, and threatened by cartel members or human traffickers?
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has vaguely suggested that these children are screened by appropriately trained personnel to identify potential victims of abuse, assault, and trafficking, but has provided no further information. What screening is being done? When is that screening taking place and by whom? Are these children being provided a thorough medical screening that may separately identify abuse and assault?
- How many victims of physical abuse, sexual assault, or trafficking has the administration identified?
- Is the federal government using DNA tests to confirm familial relations? How else is the administration ensuring that these children are being released to safe, trustworthy adults?
- What specific measures can the administration point to that confirm that these children are not released to human traffickers in the United States?
- What action is your administration taking to prosecute those who traffic unaccompanied minors?

Operation Lone Star

On April 1st, Governor Greg Abbott held a press conference in Weslaco where he provided an update on Texas' response to the humanitarian crisis at the southern border through Operation Lone Star. Prior to the press conference, the governor received a briefing from the Texas Department of Public Safety and local law enforcement on the ongoing crisis at the border. Since the launch of Operation Lone Star on March 4th, DPS has made 598 criminal arrests and made over 16,000 referrals of illegal immigrants to the U.S. Customs and Border Protection. This averaged out to 21 criminal arrests per day and more than 571 referrals per day to border patrol. The operation has also led to the seizure of 14 pounds of cocaine, 23 fire arms, and millions of dollars in currency, and the arrests of nine gang members involved in the movement of this contraband. Governor Abbott also highlighted the rise in violence at the

border, detailing stories of abuse, assault, rape, and attempted murder of migrants at the hands of smugglers and cartel members. The governor recognized DPS Trooper Curtis Woodard, who helped rescue a mother and her six-month old baby who were thrown from a raft into the river by cartel members. The governor noted that the Biden Administration's continued refusal to secure the border has perpetuated the sharp rise in illegal crossings and urged President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris to take immediate action to end the humanitarian crisis. Governor Abbott said, "Operation Lone Star is delivering results to keep our communities safe, but it is also exposing the continued failures of the Biden Administration to secure the border. I want to thank the men and women of the Texas Department of Public Safety, the National Guard, and U.S. Border Patrol for putting their lives on the line every day to secure the border, arrest dangerous criminals, and protect the victims of trafficking and smuggling. It is past time for the federal government to step up and secure the border, and I am urging the Biden Administration to take action now to save lives and get this crisis under control."

SENATE:

The Texas Senate was in session on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of last week. The Senators put in long days of floor debate.

On Monday, the Senate passed four bills including;

- **SB 3** by Senator Charles Schwertner (R-Georgetown), an **electric grid reform** bill requiring weatherization of critical facilities. *The committee substitute and six floor amendments were adopted and it passed by a vote of 31-0.*
- **SB 64** by Jane Nelson (R-Flower Mound) would create a **peer-to-peer counseling network** and increase access to licensed mental health providers for Texas **law enforcement officers**. *The committee substitute was adopted and it passed by a vote of 31-0.*
- **SB 383** by Beverly Powell (D-Burleson) would require nursing facilities and assisted living facilities to provide written **disclosure** of whether the facility is or is not **certified to provide specialized care** and treatment for residents with **Alzheimer's disease**. *It passed unanimously.*
- **SB 768** by Joan Huffman (R-Houston) would increase the criminal penalties for manufacture or **delivery of fentanyl** and related substances. *Two floor amendments were adopted and it passed by a vote of 30-1.*

On Tuesday, the Senate passed seven bills including:

- **SB 196** by Judith Zaffirini (D-Laredo) would clarify that an **alcoholic beverage manufacturer** can provide transportation to an educational program at the manufacturer's facility. *The committee substitute was adopted and it passed by a vote of 31-0.*
- **SB 343** by Lois Kolkhorst (R-Brenham) would allow law enforcement officers to access Conditions of Bond information to protect survivors of domestic violence when an **offender is released on bond**. *It passed unanimously.*
- **SB 601** by Charles Perry (R-Lubbock) would establish the **Texas Produced Water Consortium** to bring together information resources to study the economics of and technology related to the beneficial uses of produced water. *The committee substitute was adopted and it passed by a vote of 31-0.*
- **SB 863** by Cesar Blanco (D-El Paso) would allow **residential child care centers** to temporarily relocate during a declared emergency. *It passed unanimously.*

- **SB 873** by Kelly Hancock (R-North Richland Hills) would require the comptroller to prescribe the form used by the comptroller to issue a **certificate of no tax due**. *It passed unanimously.*
- **SB 941** by Dawn Buckingham (R-Lakeway) would require the Texas Department of Transportation to establish a program for designating highways as **State Scenic Byways**. *The committee substitute and one floor amendment were adopted and it passed by a vote of 30-1.*

The Senate also gave preliminary approval to **SB 12** by Bryan Hughes (R-Mineola) would prohibit an **interactive computer service** from **censoring a user**, a user's expression, or a user's ability to receive the expression of another person based on the viewpoint of the user. *The committee substitute and two floor amendments were adopted and it passed to third reading by a vote of 18-13. On Wednesday, it received final approval by the same vote.*

On Wednesday, in addition to giving final approval to third-reading bills, the Senate passed 14 other bills including:

- **SB 5** by Robert Nichols (R-Jacksonville) would **expand broadband** services to underserved areas. *The committee substitute and one floor amendment were adopted and it passed by a vote of 31-0.*
- **SB 7** by Bryan Hughes would make several changes related to **election security**. *15 floor amendments were adopted and it passed by a vote of 18-13.*
- **SB 24** by Joan Huffman (R-Houston) would require law enforcement agencies to review records of prior conduct and activities before hiring a **law enforcement officer**. *The committee substitute was adopted and it passed by a vote of 13-0.*
- **SB 30** by Royce West (D-Dallas) would allow an **owner of real property** to request that the county clerk to **remove from a recorded instrument** in the county's property records voided **racist restrictions**. *It passed unanimously.*
- **SB 244** by Paul Bettencourt (R-Houston) would subject the boards of directors of **reinvestment zones** to the Open Meetings Act. *It passed unanimously.*
- **SB 291** by Charles Schwertner (R-Georgetown) would require developers who are constructing a **commercial building project** to visibly post the name and contact information of the developer and a brief description of the project at the entrance to the construction site. *The committee substitute was adopted and it passed by a vote of 31-0.*
- **SB 507** by Robert Nichols (R-Jacksonville) would require the Texas Transportation Commission to prescribe minimum requirements for the location for the installation, and maintenance of **broadband facilities**. *The committee substitute was adopted and it passed by a vote of 31-0.*
- **SB 516** by Joan Huffman (R-Houston) would increase the penalties for an actor to wholly or partly impair or interrupt access to an **automated teller machine**. *It passed by a vote of 29-2.*
- **SB 788** by Brandon Creighton (R-Conroe) would require the Tri-Agencies develop a **model data-sharing agreement** that can be used **for sharing student information** between public schools and public and private postsecondary educational institutions. *The committee substitute was adopted and it passed by a vote of 31-0.*
- **SB 809** by Lois Kolkhorst (R-Brenham) would require **health care providers** that receive **federal money** for assisting health care providers during the COVID-19 pandemic to report the money to the Health and Human Services Commission. *The committee substitute was adopted and it passed by a vote of 31-0.*

- **SB 884** by Judith Zaffirini (D-Laredo) would transfer the **Regional Campus at Laredo** from the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio to the University of Texas System. *The committee substitute was adopted and it passed by a vote of 31-0.*
- **SB 930** by Judith Zaffirini (D-Laredo) would provide that **disease outbreaks** at nursing homes must be reported as public information. *The committee substitute was adopted and it passed by a vote of 31-0.*
- **SB 1103** by Kel Seliger (R-Amarillo) would institute occupational registration for **nurse aides**. *It passed unanimously.*
- **SB 1137** by Lois Kolkhorst (R-Brenham) would require **hospitals** to maintain and make available a list of all **standard charges** for hospital items or services. *The committee substitute was adopted and it passed by a vote of 31-0.*

And, the Senate gave preliminary approval to **SB 155** by Charles Perry (R-Lubbock) would require the secretary of state to send a notice of a **voter having been disqualified for jury service** because the voter is not a resident of the county in which the voter is registered to vote to the attorney general. *It passed to third reading by a vote of 18-13.*

Lt. Governor Dan Patrick issued a statement following the unanimous passage of SB 30, to remove racist restrictions on real estate deeds saying, “I want to congratulate Senator West on the unanimous passage of **SB 30**, one of my top priority bills. Removing the racist language found on many deeds in Texas is the right thing to do and I am proud that the Senate has taken action to correct this offensive language. I look forward to seeing this bill signed into law.”

Texas AFL-CIO President Rick Levy issued a statement about the passage of **SB 7** saying, “Jim Crow is alive and kicking in Texas. Adopting Donald Trump’s playbook, the Texas Senate majority voted to diminish voting rights and make it harder for people of color to vote in our state. SB 7 gives poll watchers and state officials outsized power to intimidate voters, purge voter lists, and issue selective threats of criminal prosecution in service to a blatantly false claim that voter fraud is anything but a rare outlier in Texas. SB 7 harms working families and deserves a quick trip to the Texas House trash can.”

Total number of bills reported out of Senate Committees this week: 116
Total number of bills passed by the Senate this week: 33
Total number of bills passed by the Senate this session: 48

This Week: The Senate reconvened on Tuesday, April 6 at 11:00 a.m.

HOUSE:

The House was in session Monday through Thursday last week. On Monday, the House conducted routine business but did not debate any bills.

On Tuesday, the House gave preliminary approval to six bills including:

- **HB 10** by Chris Paddie (R-Marshall) would restructure the board of **ERCOT**. *The committee substitute was adopted and it passed to third reading by a vote of 148-0. On Wednesday, it passed received final approval by a vote of 149-0.*
- **HB 11** by Chris Paddie (R-Marshall) would require generation providers in the ERCOT power region to prepare generation facilities to provide **adequate electric generation** service during an **extreme weather emergency**. *The committee substitute and 10 floor amendments were adopted and it passed to third reading by a vote of 143-0. On*

Wednesday, two third-reading amendments were adopted and it passed by a vote of 149-0.

- **HB 12** by Richard Raymond (D-Laredo) would require the Division of Emergency Management to conduct a study on the feasibility of establishing a **statewide disaster alert system**. *The committee substitute and five floor amendments were adopted and it passed to third reading by a vote of 148-0. On Wednesday, it passed received final approval by a vote of 147-0.*
- **HB 13** by Chris Paddie (R-Marshall) would establish the **Texas Energy Disaster Reliability Council** to prevent an extended power outage caused by a disaster. *The committee substitute and four floor amendments were adopted and it passed to third reading by a vote of 149-0.*
- **HB 16** by Ana Hernandez (D-Houston) would prohibit a retail electric provider from offering a **wholesale indexed product** to a residential customer. *The committee substitute was adopted and it passed to third reading by a vote of 111-35. On Wednesday, it passed received final approval by a vote of 116-31.*
- **HB 17** by Joe Deshotel (D-Beaumont) would **prohibit regulatory authorities** or political subdivisions from adopting a policy prohibiting or restricting the connection of a utility service or constructing infrastructure for a utility service based on the **type or source of energy** to be delivered to the end-use customer. *The committee substitute was adopted and it passed to third reading by a vote of 113-34. On Wednesday, it passed received final approval by a vote of 116-29.*

Speaker Dade Phelan issued a statement following the House's passage of its priority legislation to reform the state's electric grid in response to Winter Storm Uri saying, "The Texas House today took important first steps in passing critical, essential reforms in the aftermath of Winter Storm Uri. The actions taken by the House will help restore confidence in our critical infrastructure after the catastrophic mismanagement of our electric grid last month. The House's legislative package will reform ERCOT, ensure the reliability of our grid in extreme weather conditions, defend ratepayers, and improve coordination during times of crisis. I am proud of the House State Affairs Committee, Chairman Chris Paddie, and the entire body for giving thoughtful consideration to these important measures."

On Wednesday, the Third Reading bills passed and the House gave preliminary approval to 15 additional bills including:

- **HB 7** by Angie Chen Button (R-Garland) would exempt benefits paid as a result of a declared emergency from the calculation of an **employer's unemployment compensation tax rate**. *The committee substitute was adopted and it passed to third reading on a voice vote. On Thursday, it received final approval by a vote of 148-0.*
- **HB 33** by Alex Dominguez (D-Brownsville) would require institutions of higher education to consider certifications offered by the institution when determining whether to award a student **course credit based on the student's military training**. *One floor amendment was adopted and it passed to third reading on a voice vote. On Thursday, it received final approval by a vote of 148-0.*
- **HB 139** by Brad Buckley (D-Salado) would allow the Commissioner of Education to adopt rules establishing exceptions to **educator certification** requirements for **military veterans or military spouses**. *The committee substitute and one floor amendment were adopted and it passed to third reading on a voice vote. On Thursday, it received final approval by a vote of 148-0.*
- **HB 365** by Andrew Murr (R-Junction) would make persons **not liable** for property damage or **damages** arising from the personal injury or death of a **participant in a farm**

animal activity. *The committee substitute and one floor amendment were adopted and it passed to third reading on a voice vote. On Thursday, it received final approval by a vote of 147-0.*

- **HB 390** by Senfronia Thompson (D-Houston) would require the operator of a commercial lodging establishment to require each employee to complete an annual **human trafficking awareness and prevention training program.** *The committee substitute was adopted and it passed to third reading by a vote of 112-34. On Thursday, it received final approval by a vote of 122-26.*
- **HB 531** by Armando Walle (D-Houston) would require a landlord to provide written **notice to a tenant** detailing whether the leased dwelling is located in a 100-year floodplain. *It passed to third reading on a voice vote. On Thursday, it received final approval by a vote of 119-26.*
- **HB 567** by James Frank (R-Wichita Falls) would revise grounds and procedures for terminating **parental rights.** *The committee substitute and four floor amendments were adopted and it passed to third reading by a vote of 143-4. On Thursday, it received final approval by a vote of 143-5.*
- **HB 654** by Eddie Lucio, III (D-Brownsville) would modify application of the **rule against perpetuities** for trust interests. *It passed to third reading by a vote of 142-5. On Thursday, it received final approval by a vote of 144-3.*
- **HB 725** by Jared Patterson (R-Frisco) would grant eligibility for free **pre-kindergarten** programs to children who have been in **foster care** in another state or territory if the child now resides in Texas. *One floor amendment was adopted and it passed to third reading on a voice vote. On Thursday, it received final approval by a vote of 148-0.*
- **HB 797** by Donna Howard (D-Austin) would allow **home and hospice agencies** to administer FDA-approved **vaccines** created to treat or mitigate the spread of a communicable disease. *The committee substitute and one floor amendment were adopted and it passed to third reading on a voice vote. On Thursday, it received final approval by a vote of 148-0.*
- **HB 1195** by Charlie Geren (R-Fort Worth) would **exclude from the franchise tax** any amount provided by the **Paycheck Protection Program** Flexibility Act. *The committee substitute and one floor amendment were adopted and it passed to third reading by a vote of 145-0. On Thursday, it received final approval by a vote of 148-0.*
- **HB 1227** by Ben Leman (R-Brenham) would require timely notification of modifications to **child support orders.** *It passed to third reading on a voice vote. On Thursday, it received final approval by a vote of 147-0.*
- **HB 1401** by Ann Johnson (D-Houston) would allow requests to seal **juvenile records** to be received via electronic means. *It passed to third reading on a voice vote. On Thursday, it received final approval by a vote of 148-0.*
- **HB 1729** by Cody Harris (R-Palestine) would allow **alcohol sales** in areas annexed by the **City of Elkhart.** *It passed to third reading on a voice vote. On Thursday, it received final approval by a vote of 148-0.*
- **HB 2625** by Candy Noble (R-Lucas) would exempt **transcripts** provided by **private universities** from the sales tax (bringing them in line with transcripts provided by public universities). *It passed to third reading on a voice vote. On Thursday, it received final approval by a vote of 147-0.*

On Thursday, the House passed Third Reading bills.

House Administration Committee

On Monday, the House Administration Committee took up:

- **HR 247** by Bryan Slaton (R-Royce City) would deactivate the House **mask rule**. *It was left pending.*
- **HR 333** by Tom Oliverson (R-Cypress) would deactivate the House **mask rule**. *It was left pending.*

Total number of bills reported out of House Committees this week: 117
Total number of bills passed by the House this week: 21
Total number of bills passed by the House this session: 26

This Week: The House reconvened on Tuesday, April 6 at 2:00 p.m. Speaker Dade Phelan announced that the House will be in session this week on Tuesday through Friday.

ENERGY and ELECTRICITY:

House Energy Resources Committee – On Monday, the House Energy Resources Committee took up:

- **HB 2868** by Oscar Longoria (D-Mission) would require operators of **oil and gas wells** to maintain **financial security** of an amount set by the Railroad Commission multiplied by the number of feet of well depth (instead of \$2 per foot of well depth). *It was left pending.*
- **HB 2957** by Charlie Geren (R-Fort Worth) would authorize the Railroad Commission of Texas to use **unmanned aircraft** to inspect and **examine an oil or gas site** or facility, including a well, tank, or disposal or injection site; a pipeline facility, or a surface mining site. *It was voted out favorably.*
- **HB 3039** by Jake Ellzey (R-Midlothian) would allow the Railroad Commission to provide the notice required to be provided at least 30 days before the commission enters into a contract to **plug a delinquent inactive well** to be provided via e-mail. *It was left pending.*

Senate Business & Commerce Committee

On Tuesday, the Senate Business & Commerce Committee took up:

- **SB 2** by Kelly Hancock (R-North Richland Hills) would require **ERCOT's chair and board members** to live in Texas; require all changes to ERCOT protocols to be presented to the Public Utility Commission before adoption and allow them to veto the change before it takes effect. *It was left pending.*
- **SB 398** by Jose Menendez (D-San Antonio) would require purchase or lease agreements with a residential or small commercial customer for the operation of a **distributed renewable generation resource** to provide written contact information of the salesperson and installer, a description and cost of all equipment to be installed, a detailed accounting of associated fees, the expected operational and financial performance, and all applicable warranties. *It was reported favorably and recommended for the Local & Uncontested Calendar.*
- **SB 1278** by Kelly Hancock (R-North Richland Hills) would impose a **tax on electric generators** equal to the amount of any federal production tax credit the generator receives for a **wind project**. *It was voted out favorably as substituted.*
- **SB 1279** by Kelly Hancock (R-North Richland Hills) would prohibit retail electric providers from offering **wholesale indexed plans** to residential and small-commercial customers. *It was left pending.*

- **SB 1281** by Kelly Hancock (R-North Richland Hills) would require the Public Utility Commission to identify projects where the cost of a transmission line would be completely offset by **lower congestion costs** to customers. *It was left pending.*
- **SB 1282** by Kelly Hancock (R-North Richland Hills) would require the Public Utility Commission to price **wholesale transmission services** within ERCOT based on the postage stamp method of pricing under which a transmission-owning utility's rate is based on the ERCOT utilities' combined annual costs of transmission divided by the total demand placed on the combined transmission systems of all such transmission-owning utilities within a power region. *It was left pending.*
- **SB 1580** by Kelly Hancock (R-North Richland Hills) would authorize **electric cooperatives** to utilize **securitization** to address the extraordinary costs and expenses created by Winter Storm Uri. *It was left pending.*

House State Affairs Committee

On Thursday, the House State Affairs Committee took up:

- **HB 2639** by Christina Morales (D-Houston) would require the Public Utility Commission to **study** the impacts of existing **interconnections of electric transmission service facilities in Texas** with facilities in **Mexico**, including impacts on transmission and distribution networks and retail customers in Texas and Mexico and the potential impact of establishing new interconnections between retail customers in Texas and Mexico. *It was left pending.*
- **HB 3544** by Justin Holland (R-Rockwall) would enable **electric cooperatives** to use securitization financing to recover extraordinary costs and expenses incurred because of the abnormal weather events of February, 2021. *It was left pending.*
- **HB 3615** by Phil King (R-Weatherford) would clarify that information reasonably related to a **municipally owned utility's rate review process** and how the municipality or utility sets rates for electric service and chilled water service or any other service to curb peak demand or shift load are subject to public disclosure. *It was left pending.*
- **HB 3853** by Charles "Doc" Anderson (R-Waco) would authorize an electric utility to own, construct, maintain, and operate fiber optic cables and other facilities for providing **middle mile broadband service** **HB 4492** by Chris Paddie (R-Marshall) would provide **securitization financing** to enable **electric utilities** to recover extraordinary costs the electric utilities incurred and may incur to secure electric supply and provide service during natural and man-made disasters and system failures. *It was left pending.*

Reported/Voted From Committee

- **HB 14** by Craig Goldman (R-Fort Worth) would establish the **Texas Electricity Supply Chain Mapping Committee** to map the state's electricity supply chain. *It was voted favorably as substituted from the House Energy Resources Committee.*
- **HB 632** by Drew Darby (R-San Angelo) would establish the TexNet Technical Advisory Committee for the **TexNew seismic monitoring program** administered by the University of Texas Bureau of Economic Geology to develop recommendations for a program of work to assist the program and any research efforts affiliated with the program in accomplishing the goals of the program. *It was voted favorably as substituted from the House Energy Resources Committee.*
- **HB 964** by Drew Darby (R-San Angelo) would provide that a person who generates drill cuttings and transfers the drill cuttings to a recycling facility or an oil and gas waste disposal facility to be recycled or disposed of is **not liable in tort** for a consequence of the subsequent use or disposal of the drill cuttings. *It was voted favorably as substituted from the House Energy Resources Committee.*

- **HB 1284** by Chris Paddie (R-Marshall) would give the Railroad Commission (instead of Texas Commission on Environmental Quality) regulatory authority over the injection and **geologic storage of carbon dioxide**. *It was voted favorably as substituted by the House Energy Resources Committee.*
- **HB 1520** by Chris Paddie (R-Marshall) would authorize the Public Finance Authority to issue obligations or other evidences of indebtedness for financing **customer rate relief bonds** approved by the Railroad Commission of Texas. *It was voted favorably as substituted from the House Energy Resources Committee.*
- **HB 1572** by Tom Craddick (R-Midland) would clarify that an **entity that rents electric service equipment** to a third-party or operates its own electric service equipment on behalf of a third-party for a fixed fee or based on use or consumption is not a retail electric provider. *It was voted favorably as substituted from the House State Affairs Committee.*
- **HB 1607** by Drew Darby (R-San Angelo) would require the Public Utility Commission, as part of its decision to grant or deny a **certificate of public convenience and necessity for construction of a transmission line** a comparison of the levelized estimated cost of the transmission project and the estimated cost savings and economic benefits that may result from the project. *It was voted favorably as substituted from the House State Affairs Committee.*
- **HB 2201** by Trent Ashby (R-Lufkin) would require the Railroad Commission to establish standards governing permissible locations for **commercial oil and gas disposal facilities** and include a history of flooding in the ten years preceding the construction of the pit as a factor in determining whether a proposed location of a pit is permissible. *It was voted favorably as substituted from the House Energy Resources Committee.*
- **HB 2483** by Phil King (R-Weatherford) would authorize a **transmission and distribution utility** to lease or own and operate facilities that provide **temporary, emergency electric energy** to aid in restoration of service to its own distribution customers during a widespread outage; and allow them to procure and own, or enter into a cooperative agreement with other utilities to jointly procure and own, long lead time facilities that would aid in restoration of electric service for its own distribution customers following a widespread outage. *It was voted favorably as substituted from the House State Affairs Committee.*
- **SB 415** by Kelly Hancock (R-North Richland Hills) would authorize a transmission and distribution utility to contract with a power generation company to provide electric energy from an **electric energy storage facility** to ensure reliable service to distribution customers; but would prohibit a transmission and distribution utility from owning an electric energy storage facility. *It was reported favorably as substituted from the Senate Business & Commerce Committee and recommended for the Local & Uncontested Calendar.*
- **SB 760** by Drew Springer (R-Muenster) would specify procedures for **solar power facilities** to be removed from a landowner's property. *It was reported favorably from the Senate Business & Commerce Committee and recommended for the Local & Uncontested Calendar.*

STATEWIDE – COVID-19 RESPONSE:

DSHS Weekly Vaccine Distribution Update

On March 26th the Department of State Health Services issued its weekly update on Vaccine distribution in Texas for the week of March 28th. More than 1 million first doses of COVID-19 vaccine will be shipped to providers across Texas next week. The Texas Department of State

Health Services is allocating 818,410 doses (compared to 685,470 first doses last week) to 779 providers (compared to 481 providers last week) in 202 counties (compared to 183 counties last week). More than 200,000 additional first doses are expected to be available to pharmacy locations and federally-qualified health centers directly from the federal government. Here is some information provided:

- Texas has now administered more than 10 million doses, an increase of 1.2 million in the last week.
- More than 6.8 million people have received at least one dose, and almost 3.5 million are fully vaccinated.
- Among Texas seniors, more than six in 10 have received at least one dose, and four in 10 are now fully vaccinated. More than 30 percent of all Texans at least 16 years old have gotten at least one dose.

Beginning Monday, all Texans ages 16 and older will be eligible to receive a vaccine. Vaccination has helped drive down the number of new cases and people hospitalized with COVID-19 to their lowest level since October. However, with hundreds of variant cases identified in Texas that have the potential to spread more quickly and cause more serious disease, vaccination remains critically important. The available vaccines have proven effective against the variant strains, so the more people vaccinated, the easier it will be to keep the variants under control and prevent new ones from emerging. In addition to the first doses mentioned above, the state is ordering 587,950 doses (compared to 674,580 second doses last week) intended as the second dose for people first vaccinated a few weeks ago. DSHS automatically orders second doses to arrive at providers in the week they can begin to be administered, so they will be available when needed. People should be able to return to the same provider to receive their second dose within six weeks of getting the first.

Federally Supported Community Vaccination Centers

On March 26th, Governor Greg Abbott and the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) requested an extension of the Federally Supported Community Vaccination Centers in Arlington, Dallas, and Houston. Originally launched in February, these federal pilot sites are based at E Sports Stadium, Fair Park, and NRG Stadium, and are part of a joint effort to support vaccination efforts in underserved areas. The sites are operated by FEMA in partnership with the state of Texas through TDEM and local officials. TDEM submitted the request on March 22nd, for an extension of supplies, personnel, and vaccine. A request was also made on March 19th to establish a similar community vaccination site at the Alamodome in San Antonio. FEMA denied this request. Governor Abbott said, "The mass community vaccination sites in Arlington, Dallas, and Houston have been crucial to expanding vaccine access in underserved communities, and I urge FEMA to approve our request for an extension to these sites. Continuing operations at these vaccination sites will ensure that even more Texans can get vaccinated and will help keep our communities safe."

Ten Million Vaccines Administered

On March 26th, Governor Greg Abbott announced that ten million COVID-19 vaccines have been administered to Texans across the state, with over 30 percent of eligible Texans having received a vaccine. This significant milestone is a result of dedicated work by the Texas Division of Emergency Management, the Texas Department of State Health Services, the Texas National Guard, and the healthcare workers and volunteers across the state who have helped administer these vaccines. Governor Abbott said, "Hitting ten million vaccines is a major accomplishment in our state's continued fight against COVID-19. I want to thank all the healthcare workers and volunteers that made this milestone possible. However, the fight is not over. Vaccines are the most effective tool to combat COVID-19 in our communities, and we will

continue to expand vaccine access for those who choose to get vaccinated. As more vaccines become available and eligibility opens to all Texans, I urge Texans who wish to get the COVID-19 vaccine to sign up to help us keep our communities safe. Here in Texas, COVID-19 vaccines will always be strongly encouraged and always voluntary.” The State of Texas has steadily expanded vaccine access since doses first became available late last year. Texas was the first state to administer one million vaccines and continues to vaccinate thousands of Texans every day. DSHS has directed vaccine providers to prioritize people 80 years old or older when scheduling appointments and accommodate anyone in that age group who presents for vaccination, whether or not they have an appointment, by immediately moving them to the front of the line.

Texas Public Health Vaccine Scheduler

On March 29th, as Texas opens COVID-19 vaccine eligibility to everyone age 16 and older, the Texas Department of State Health Services is launching the Texas Public Health Vaccine Scheduler. The scheduler gives people one place to sign up for a COVID-19 shot through multiple public health departments, including the eight DSHS public health regions, which provide public health services in nearly 200 Texas counties and more than a dozen local health entities across the state. Texas residents can visit the website to create a profile that includes their contact information, demographic details, and preferred time of day and days of the week for an appointment. Within a day, people eligible to be vaccinated will be matched with the next available appointment within their home county and preferred times. If none are available, the scheduler will continue to search for appointments as new clinics are scheduled and contact individuals when they have an appointment. While most people will sign up online, a toll-free number is available to assist special populations that have difficulty using the online registration tool, including older adults over age 65, people with disabilities, and those with limited Internet access or other barriers to using technology. People in those groups can call 1-833-832-7067 from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. seven days a week to enroll in the scheduler and get help making an appointment. If there is no participating health department in their area, they will be referred to local providers conducting vaccination near them. The Texas Public Health Vaccine Scheduler will not replace all COVID-19 vaccine registration in the state. Many entities – including pharmacies, medical practices and some public health departments – are operating their own registration systems and will continue to do so. People who want to be vaccinated should continue to look for available vaccine at those providers, as well.