

August 2017 Austin Report

Here is a link to a very recent radio interview about new refineries being promoted in Texas. One would be in our region:

<http://www.texasstandard.org/stories/new-refineries-are-coming-to-texas-for-the-first-time-in-decades/>

Generally speaking, the House and Senate are still at odds over the fate of legislation in the special session, with the major sticking point remaining the bathroom bill. The Lt. Governor has just appeared to extend an olive branch to the House, but its impact is doubtful.

Below is a summary of five points that the Texas Tribune says are key to understanding the session thus far, which is at the halfway mark toward the 30-day deadline:

1. The two chambers are operating at different speeds.

As of Monday evening, the Senate had passed 20 pieces of legislation related to 18 items on Abbott's call. The House had approved eight bills related to four items.

2. The House is charting its own course.

House members have held hearings on topics not included on the governor's call, stretched the boundaries of those that are and, in at least one case, directly flouted the governor's wishes.

In the House Natural Resources Committee, Chairman Lyle Larson, a San Antonio Republican, heard eight bills on water regulation last week, despite Abbott's veto of five bills containing similar provisions during the regular session. Those bills are sure to meet a similar fate now, especially since Larson and Rep. Davis have just called for the same ethics reform that angered Abbott during the regular session.

Abbott is unlikely to welcome a bill the chamber passed regulating city ordinances on tree removal last week, which while technically within the bounds of his special session agenda, replicates legislation he vetoed in June for not going far enough. The version of the legislation championed by Abbott, authored by state Rep. Paul Workman, R-Austin, is stuck in the House Urban Affairs Committee.

3. All signs point to another standoff on "bathroom" legislation.

The Senate has already passed a bill, but the House is listening to the business, law enforcement, school district and church interests who oppose the bill and are dragging their feet and seem determined to defeat it.

4. Property taxes are at the center of a debate over local control.

The House and Senate are already closer than they were in the regular session when it comes to an agreement on a proposal to require local governments get voter approval for some increased property tax collections. However, legislation in the House suggests that its members could be open to giving local officials more breathing room when it comes to how much money they can raise – and how much the state requires them to spend.

Senate Bill 1, which the Senate has already approved, could require cities, counties and some special taxing districts to get voter approval if they want to increase tax collections on existing land and buildings 4 percent compared to the previous year.

House Bill 4 sets the required election threshold at 6 percent. If the full House passes the current version of HB 4, that threshold would be one of many differences the two chambers will have to work out in a conference committee.

Meanwhile, the House Ways and Means Committee has already sent 17 other bills related to property taxes on to the full chamber. The committee has considered 18 others, which are still pending.

And while many of Abbott's agenda items for the special session are aimed at limiting local governments' powers on everything from spending to regulating trees on private property, one House resolution aims to make the state constitutionally responsible for covering a local government's cost to comply with new laws.

“If the state requires you to provide some service, then the state needs to have the ability to send the resources to accomplish that goal,” said state Rep. [Drew Darby](#), a San Angelo Republican who co-authored [House Joint Resolution 31](#). “The same way the state complains of the federal government requiring unfunded mandates, I think the same principle should apply to the state also.”

The House passed a similar resolution during the regular session, but it went nowhere in the Senate. Still, Rick Thompson with the Texas Association of Counties is hopeful that the measure could end up on a ballot in November.

5. The governor isn't sweating his agenda's fate — yet.

While Abbott started the special session [vowing to publish daily lists](#) of lawmakers who oppose his agenda, he has since dialed back the tough talk and sought to play nice with lawmakers, particularly in the House. He finally released his first batch of lists Friday — but only those of legislators who are supporting bills related to each item on the call.

Abbott also has not expressed any concern about the House's sluggish pace compared to that of the Senate, saying he is pleased with the lower chamber's speed and believes its members are taking his agenda seriously. In multiple media appearances, Abbott has voiced confidence in his agenda's chances in the House, predicting the lower chamber will "outperform."

At the same time, though, Abbott has resisted calls by House members to expand the call.

“The most important thing is we pass the 20 items that I put on the special session agenda,” Abbott told an Austin TV station Wednesday. “Once we get that done, we can consider other matters.” “We must go 20 for 20 before we address anything else,” he added.