



Austin Landline Report March 2019

The Texas Legislature has been mostly consumed with deliberating and debating property tax reform and school finance, but this week there was a marathon hearing in the Senate on an issue of prime concern to STPRA- eminent domain reform. The subject of the hearing was SB 421 by Senator Lois Kolkhorst of Brenham, which is a comprehensive bill that was drafted largely with the input of Farm Bureau, Cattle Raisers and the Texas Wildlife Association.

We registered our support for SB 421 at the hearing, but are also hoping to have two additional bills filed which would augment that large bill or be ‘free-standing’ eminent domain improvements on their own. We hope that SB 421 and its House companion, HB 991 by Burns, advance, but some significant hurdles remain. The challenges of coming to terms with competing industry interests came to a head at the hearing during an exchange between Todd Staples, who now directs the Texas Oil and Gas Association, and Senator Kolkhorst. The chair of the Senate State Affairs Committee has given both sides until Monday to work out a compromise for a scheduled vote. We understand that the Lt. Governor is strongly calling for a consensus to be reached, as well.

Our team is closely monitoring a number of other bills of interest to STPRA and weighing in where appropriate. On Wednesday, Eric Opiela testified before a House Ways and Means Committee hearing in opposition to a bill, SB 135 by Nichols and HB 639 by Springer, that would make it harder for landowners to achieve open space tax exemptions. Additionally, there are quite a few water bills and others to be watched, which we are now listing in our “bill track”, which we are sharing with STPRA members on a weekly basis. We will be providing more details as deliberations intensify!