



## **Austin Landline Report January 2021**

Even though the 87<sup>th</sup> session of the Texas Legislature is scheduled to meet a week from yesterday on January 12<sup>th</sup>, uncertainty remains over exactly how the House and Senate will conduct their proceedings in light of the pandemic. What does seem fairly certain, though, is that their procedures are likely to be somewhat different.

With the outcome of the Speaker's race now settled, there is much speculation on committee assignment and designated chairs by Speaker -in- Waiting Dade Phelan. I was particularly happy to see that Marissa Patton, formerly of TSCRA and the Farm Bureau, and Ross Geisinger, formerly general counsel for Senator Lois Kolkhorst, have joined the Speaker's staff as policy advisors on issues affecting landowners.

As for the Senate, there will be at least three new members: Sarah Eckhardt of Austin, Roland Gutierrez of San Antonio, and Drew Springer, of Northeast Texas and former chair of House Ag, who just won a special election run-off. Committee assignments in the Senate are not expected to be changed drastically, given that Lt. Governor Patrick will still be in charge.

Pre-filing of bills began in November, but the usual crunch has not been seen due to greater focus on the budget and public health and safety. Nevertheless, several bills of interest to us have already been filed. Just this morning, Rep. Burns filed H.B. 966, which could affect the paying of legal fees in lawsuits involving groundwater conservation districts. Rep. Burns, who filed a similar bill last session, has also filed H.B. 902, which would be a comprehensive reform of eminent domain procedures.

Rep. Lozano has filed two bills, H.B. 687 and H.B. 341, which would enhance local prosecution of human and drug smuggling. Rep. Raymond has filed H.B. 952 which would make it easier for landowners to achieve ag valuation. Sen. Perry and Rep. Harris have filed companion bills, S.B. 152 and H.B. 668, ostensibly to benefit landowners in groundwater district proceedings.

As things develop, our great "Austin team" of Eric Opiela, Joe Maley, and Charles Maley look forward to keeping you represented and up-to-date!