



Austin Landline Report March 2021

The Session Begins in Earnest

The 87th Legislative session has been very slow in getting going this year due to the pandemic, a change in the Speakership, and more recently the freeze and week-long shut down. Eric Opiela, Charles Maley and I made our first foray into the Capitol building yesterday, which is now a whole new experience. Before entering the building, everyone is asked to do a rapid COVID test in a tent at the north entrance. Getting the results takes at least 15 minutes, which means that everyone is basically captive in the waiting area, which can provide opportunities to have impromptu conversations with various people. I happened to be waiting with former Ag. Commissioner Todd Staples, who now represents the oil and gas industry, and was able to have a discussion with him about ways we could possibly agree on eminent domain reform. Once our team gathered in the building, we found very few people in the Capitol, but nevertheless had good luck in cornering key people and setting up meetings with others. The offices vary from being completely shut down to being wide open, but there was enough activity to make our visit very worthwhile. It will be interesting to see how things go forward!

House Committee Assignments

Speaker Dade Phelan announced his committee appointments earlier this month. There were a number of important assignments for Representatives from South Texas. Tracy King, who we know well as a friend, replaced Lyle Larson as chair of Natural Resources. Tracy represents Uvalde and part of Webb Counties. Former chairman Lyle Larson of San Antonio remains on that committee as a member and our friend Eddie Lucio III returns as a member. Todd Hunter of Corpus Christi is chair of the all-important -this-year Redistricting Committee. Richard Raymond of Laredo is chair of Defense and Veterans Affairs. Dustin Burrows, who has close family ties with our friends and members in this area, is chair of the very powerful Calendars Committee, which controls which bills get sent to the floor after passing in committees. Rep. Guillen got the chairmanship of Resolutions, which provides some level of prestige as a chairman and does provide extra money for staff. For the first time in many sessions, J.M. did not get a chairmanship, though he got vice-chair of Public Education. He also got appointed to the Transportation Committee, which will again be chaired by Terry Canales of McAllen. Other significant vice-chairs from our STX area are Bobby Guerra of Public Health and Abel Herrero of Energy Resources.

Legislation

Obviously, the latest weather/energy delivery disaster has been added to the forefront of legislative priorities, along with the energy sector-related and COVID-related economic downturn. Nevertheless, there will be a number of bills about which we must remain vigilante, both pro and con. The deadline for filing bills is March 11th and some bills have just started being referred to committees. We will soon start issuing a weekly tracking report on our bills of interest.