



Austin Landline Report November 2021

September in odd numbered years is the month that we can to begin to applaud or lament the work of the Texas Legislature that runs January through May every other year. September 1st is the default effective date of a majority of new or modified State laws, including the three legislative priorities of STPRA that passed during the 87th regular session. Last month at our 16th Annual-Annual Meeting and Fundraiser (AMF), the Austin Team was joined by John Hubert, Kennedy/Kleberg Co. DA, in a session moderated by Zack Brady, an accomplished property rights attorney with Brady & Hamilton, LLP, to discuss our association's legislative accomplishments in 2021. Unfortunately, the members of the Legislature that were scheduled to join us had to remain in Austin to vote on the often controversial but necessary redistricting maps that have to be drawn as a result of the most recent census numbers.

This year has seen our Legislature working it's way through the effects of a worldwide health and economic crisis, an unprecedented series of humanitarian and security catastrophes on our southern border, and census numbers that get tallied every ten years. It is no wonder that Gov. Abbott called them back for their 3rd special session. The redrawing of maps alone can take multiple 30 day sessions to accomplish, but add in the unfinished business of some of the Governor's priorities, which included border security and property tax relief, and you end up with three, four, or even five extra months of political wrangling.

It is unfortunate that the census is such a political problem; Republicans in Democrat controlled states whine while Democrats in Republican controlled states moan. Every time the tides turn, one party cries and the other smiles, only to do just the opposite when they turn again. STPRA represents a diverse mix of members from the full spectrum of political ideologies. We are voluntarily drawn together in pursuit of a specific subset of common goals because of the unique challenges we face as South Texans. As an association, it is neither to our gain nor to our credit to get drawn into endless political tug of war. The annual agenda adopted by our members drives our policy and our actions. In implementing the policy you have adopted, we must maintain close ties with Legislators, members of Congress and local officials, from both parties. It is for these reasons that we refrain from any input into the redistricting process on behalf of the association.

This time around, Texas will be gaining two additional congressional seats. More seats means that our state's interests should be better represented in Washington. The most concerning aspect of redistricting that I see for our membership is not partisan at all. Since the vast majority of growth in our state occurs in urban centers, each new shuffling of the maps means less representation of our rural areas in both Austin and Washington. We are by necessity having to work harder and harder to have our message heard and understood.

If you missed the AMF this year, please get us on your calendar at the earliest opportunity for next year. You missed a great event and we missed you.

I would like to personally thank Zach Brady, John Hubert, and STPRA President Eric Opiela for an exceptionally informative legislative panel; Congressman Henry Cuellar, USBP Chief Raul Ortiz, and Commander Mark McGinnis for a well rounded speaker line-up that both entertained and informed our members; Sarah Jones and Nicole Coates for always going the extra mile to bring us a great event; Kappa Sigma fraternity with UTRGV - Edinburg for providing needed volunteers with a sincere desire to help; and Susan Kibbe who seems to go 90mph for this association all year until AMF week when she operates at 110 to keep us all focused and productive(and on-time).

A special thank you to STPRA board member Sylvia Chavez and her staff at Tacubaya Ranch for all the many hours and special accommodations that made this year's event most memorable.

To our sponsors, exhibitors and advertisers, we cannot do what we do without your support.

Your Austin Team,
Eric Opiela, Joe Maley, Charles Maley, and Robert Howard