



February 5, 2021 | Regular Session, Issue 4 | 87th Regular Session

Every Friday, this newsletter will keep you up to speed on some of the legislation important to Texas Farm Bureau members that Austin staff are following.

Please do not hesitate to contact the appropriate staff with any questions.

2021 Texas Farm Bureau Virtual Leadership Conference:

Feb. 9, 2021

Please join us at **3:00 p.m. this Tuesday, Feb. 9**, for the 2021 Texas Farm Bureau Virtual Leadership Conference. We will be meeting with Texas legislators to discuss eminent domain reform and other critical agricultural and rural issues.

Although this will be an unusual legislative session, Texas Farm Bureau still has priority issues to accomplish. This virtual leadership conference will provide information our grassroots need to advocate on these issues.

After opening comments from TFB President Russell Boening, state legislators will participate in a discussion panel.

Legislators who have agreed to participate in the Eminent Domain Panel include:

- Sen. Lois Kolkhorst (R-Brenham), SD 18
- Rep. DeWayne Burns (R-Cleburne), HD 58

Legislators who have agreed to participate in the Agricultural/Rural Issue Panel include:

- Sen. Charles Perry (R-Lubbock), SD 28
- Sen. Drew Springer (R-Muenster), SD 30
- Rep. Andrew Murr (R-Junction), HD 53
- Rep. Mary Gonzalez (D-Clint), HD 75

Following the discussions, TFB legislative staff will share an update on other legislation important to Texas Farm Bureau.

You can [click here](#) to register.

Legislative Update

Rural Connectivity

Governor Abbott declares Texas Farm Bureau Priority Issue an Emergency Item

Governor Abbott delivered the State of the State Address on Monday evening. He began by honoring the essential workers who helped Texas through adversity in 2020—specifically recognizing farmers and ranchers.

“In times of adversity, there will always be heroes who rise above the challenges we face. Our communities are filled with heroes. Heroes who summoned the strength and perseverance to fight. Not just for themselves or their families, but for their neighbors, their communities and even complete strangers...think of our farmers and the ranchers who provide the food that is so desperately needed,” Abbott said.

In addition to updates on the governor’s plans to address effects of the pandemic, Abbott announced five emergency items for this legislative session. While the Legislature usually has to wait 60 days before voting on proposed legislation, they are permitted to move forward on specific issues as soon as the governor declares it an emergency. Among the five items is one of TFB’s priorities: rural connectivity.

The governor included the following quote from TFB President Russell Boening in his official press release about the address:

"The Texas Farm Bureau greatly appreciates Governor Abbott making broadband development a priority in our state. Over 88 percent of disconnected Texans live in rural areas. Broadband is essential to the quality of rural life and to modern agriculture. Broadband is critical for rural Texans to access education and healthcare. Texas farmers and ranchers need rural broadband to follow commodity markets, communicate with customers, and access new markets around the world. We thank Gov. Abbott for his leadership on this very important issue."

Rural Connectivity Legislation

TFB is closely monitoring the following rural connectivity bills that have already been filed:

- Rep. Ken King’s [HB 425](#);
- Sen. Charles Perry’s [SB 154](#);
- Rep. Trent Ashby’s & Sen. Robert Nichols’ [HB 1446](#) / [SB 506](#)

You can read about King’s HB 425 and Perry’s SB 154 on Issue 2 of the Austin Newsletter [here](#).

[HB 1446](#) / [SB 506](#): Relating to the expansion of broadband services to certain areas.

[Rep. Ashby, Trent](#) (R) and [Sen. Nichols, Robert](#) (R).

Summary

These companion bills create the Broadband Development Office within the Comptroller's Department, appoints a nonvoting representative from the Broadband Development Office to the Governor's Broadband Development Council, creates a detailed Broadband Development Map, and creates a grant program to fund connectivity projects across the state.

The Broadband Development Office will:

- Serve as a resource for information regarding broadband service in this state, and
- Engage in outreach to communities regarding the expansion and adoption of broadband service and related programs.

A person appointed by the office to serve on the Governor's Broadband Development Council would assist the council with maintaining accountability and follow up research to ensure that rural connectivity is meeting the goals of the broadband development program.

The Broadband Development Program would award grants, low-interest loans, and other financial incentives to applicants for broadband projects in unserved areas designated on the Broadband Development Map. The map would identify *eligible areas*—where less than 80 percent of the addresses in the block have access to broadband service. The map would be published and regularly updated on the comptroller's website.

Program funding, placed into the *Broadband Development Account*, would come from a variety of sources: legislative appropriations, gifts, donations, federal grants, and interest earned on the investment of the account.

TFB **supports** HB 1446 and SB 506. (TFB 2021 Policy: Rural Living Section 183, Pages 116-117, Lines 47-54.)

Eminent Domain

[HB 1506](#): Relating to the possession of condemned property by the condemnor pending the results of further litigation.

[Rep. Zwiener, Erin](#) (D)

Summary

HB 1506 would require condemnors to pay the following Special Commissioner's awards, all within a week of the decision, while the award is being appealed:

- *damages and costs* paid directly to the property owner,

- deposit the *total property payment* with the court, and
- file a document promising to pay *additional court costs* if they arise.

If the award is appealed, the bill would require private condemnors to wait a minimum of 6 months to take possession of the property after the Special Commissioner's decision.

Public entities would be allowed to take possession of the property if they pay the damages to the property owner or deposit the award with the court, while the award is being appealed.

The bill allows the condemnor and property owner to enter a voluntary agreement to take possession of the property.

TFB **supports** HB 1506. (TFB Policy: Eminent Domain 151, Page 61, Lines 16-21.)

Agricultural Facility Vandalism

HB 1480 / SB 472: Relating to the protection of animal and crop facilities; creating a criminal offense.

[Rep. Cyrier, John P.](#) (R) and [Sen. Kolkhorst, Lois](#) (R).

Summary

HB 1480 and SB 472 would create a criminal offense for the intention or act of releasing, stealing, or destroying animals or crops from an agricultural facility.

- "Animals" includes livestock, poultry, domestic, and wild animals.
- "Crops" includes plants capable of producing: food, fiber, medicine, nursery stock, floral products, or aesthetic beauty.
- "Facility" includes tractors, trailers, farm husbandry equipment, buildings, greenhouses, structures, labs, fields, ponds, other animal/crop storage, bee colonies, and livestock markets.

The offense is a Class B Misdemeanor if the damage is between \$500-\$2,500. It is a Class A Misdemeanor if the damage is more than \$2,500. The offense may be separately prosecuted as felony criminal mischief or felony theft.

The bill would require courts to order financial restitution for the victim. No minimum damage amount is specified.

TFB **supports** HB 1480 and SB 472. (TFB Policy: Animal Welfare 149, Page 56, Line 2)

House Committees

This week, House Speaker Dade Phelan (R-Beaumont) announced the House of Representatives committee appointments for the 87th Legislative Session.

Texas Farm Bureau is proud to highlight that Rep. DeWayne Burns (R-Cleburne), former Johnson County Farm Bureau president and former YF&R Committee chair, was appointed chair of the Agriculture & Livestock Committee, and also that Rep. Andrew Murr (R-Junction), former Kimble County Farm Bureau president, will chair the Corrections Committee.

The following House Committees will likely cover most of the issues important to Texas Farm Bureau:

The **Agriculture & Livestock** Committee has jurisdiction over agriculture, the livestock industry, the lumber industry, issues particularly affecting rural areas of the state, and related state agencies.

Rep. DeWayne Burns will chair the committee and Rep. Charles "Doc" Anderson will serve as vice chair. Other members are Rep. Bailes, Cyrier, Cole, Guillen, Herrero, Rosenthal, and Toth.

The **Appropriations** Committee is a 27-member committee that has jurisdiction over bills pertaining to the state budget. The committee may also comment on any legislation containing provisions that result in the permanent allocation of funds.

Appropriations is chaired by Rep. Greg Bonnen and vice-chaired by Rep. Mary González. Other members are Reps. Ashby, Bell, Capriglione, Dean, Dominguez, Gates, Holland, Howard, Ann Johnson, Julie Johnson, Jarvis Johnson, Minjarez, Morrison, Raney, Rose, Schaefer, Sherman, Stucky, Thompson, Toth, VanDeaver, Walle, Wilson, Wu, and Zwiener.

The **Culture, Recreation & Tourism** Committee focuses on state parks, wildlife and fish management and conservation, hunting and fishing in the state, historical resources, Texas' image and heritage, international and interstate tourist promotion and development, the Texas Economic Development and Tourism Office, and other related agencies.

Rep. Ken King will chair the committee, and Rep. Barbara Gervin-Hawkins will serve as vice chair. Other committee members include Reps. Burns, Clardy, Israel, Frullo, Krause, Martinez, and Morales.

The **Environmental Regulation** Committee shall have nine members, with jurisdiction over all matters pertaining to air, land and water pollution, the environmental regulation of industrial development, the regulation of waste disposal and environmental matters regulated by the Department of State Health Services for the TCEQ, and the Texas Low-Level Radioactive Waste Disposal Compact Commission.

Chairing the committee is Rep. Brooks Landgraf, and Rep. Alex Dominguez will serve as vice chair. The other members of the committee include Reps. Kuempel, Reynolds, Dean, Goodwin, Kacal, Morales, and Morrison.

The **Land & Resource Management** Committee has jurisdiction over all matters pertaining to the management of public lands; the power of eminent domain; the creation, modification, and regulation of municipal utility districts; annexation,

zoning, and other governmental regulation of land use; and the following state agencies: The School Land Board, the Board for Lease of University Lands, and the General Land Office.

The Land & Resource Management Committee is chaired by Rep. Joe Deshotel and vice chaired by Rep. Ben Leman. Other members are Reps. Biedermann, Romero, Thierry, Burrows, Craddick, and Rosenthal. The winner of the current special election in House District 68 will be assigned to this committee.

The **Local & Consent Calendars** will have jurisdiction over the placement on appropriate calendar bills and resolutions that are local or will be uncontested and have been recommended by the committee of original jurisdiction.

The Local & Consent Calendars Committee is chaired by Rep. Charlie Geren and vice chaired by Rep. Alex Dominguez. The other members of the committee include Reps. Bowers, Buckley, Dean, Ellzey, Gervin-Hawkins, Guerra, Mayer, Middleton, and Morales.

The **Natural Resources** Committee has jurisdiction over the conservation of the natural resources of Texas; the use of all water in the state; irrigation; groundwater conservation districts, water supply districts, water control and improvement districts, conservation and reclamation districts, and all similar organs of local government dealing with water; the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality as it relates to the regulation of water resources; and related state agencies.

The Natural Resources Committee is chaired by Rep. Tracy King and vice chaired by Rep. Cody Harris. Other committee members include Reps. Bowers, Kacal, Larson, Lucio, Paul, Price, Ramos, Walle, and Willson.

The **Transportation** Committee has jurisdiction over commercial motor vehicles, the Texas highway system, private passenger vehicles to operate on the roads and highways of the state, traffic, railway lines, air traffic, facilities used in water transportation, metropolitan transit, and related state agencies.

Transportation is chaired by Rep. Terry Canales and vice chaired by Rep. Ed Thompson. Other members are Reps. Ashby, Bucy III, Davis, Harris, Landgraf, Lozano, Martinez, Ortega, Perez, Rogers, and Smithee.

The **Ways & Means** Committee has jurisdiction over changes to and collection of state revenue; state taxes or other fees; the state treasury; local government revenue; local government taxes; appraisal of property for taxation; the Tax Code; and the following organizations and state agencies: Multistate Tax Commission, Compact Commissioner for Texas, and the Comptroller of Public Accounts.

Ways & Means is chaired by Rep. Morgan Meyer and vice chaired by Rep. Shawn Thierry. Other members are Reps. Button, Cole, Guerra, Martinez-Fischer, Murphy, Noble, Rodriguez, Sanford, and Shine.

More information on House Committees can be found [here](#).

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