



AUSTIN NEWSLETTER

Texas Farm Bureau's Weekly Newsletter for the 88th Legislature

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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.

Update on Previously Reported Bills

[HB 9](#) and **[HJR 125](#)**: Relating to the development and funding of broadband and telecommunications services.

[Ashby, Trent \(R\)](#)

Summary:

HB 9 sets up a new funding mechanism for the Texas Broadband Infrastructure Fund. The bill would create the Texas Broadband Infrastructure Fund to provide \$5 billion in state funding to ensure expansion of broadband throughout rural Texas.

The legislation would also fully fund the Universal Service Fund, which ensures connectivity throughout rural Texas. The creation of this fund and dedication of the funding would have to be approved by constitutional amendment—d HJR 125 by Rep. Ashby.

Update:

HB 9 passed the House of Representatives with a 139-7 vote. HJR 125 passed the House of Representatives with a 137-7 vote. Both bills will now go over to the Senate.

TFB **supports** HB 9 and HJR 125. (TFB 2023 Policy: Utilities Section 148, Page 53, Lines 50-53, Rural Living 183, Page 119, Lines 46-53)

[HB 1971](#): Relating to the procedures for acting on a permit or permit amendment application by a groundwater conservation district and the disqualification of board members of groundwater conservation districts.

[Ashby, Trent \(R\)](#)

Update:

HB 1971 passed the House of Representatives with a 147-0 vote and will now go over to the Senate.

TFB **supports** HB 1971. (TFB 2023 Policy: Groundwater 153 page 70, lines 45-48; page 71, lines 140-145.)

HB 2818: Relating to the production and regulation of hemp; providing administrative penalties; creating a criminal offense.

[Cain, Briscoe \(R\)](#)

Summary:

This bill allows the Department of Agriculture to request changes to Texas hemp cultivation rules so as to keep in line with changing state statutes, federal statutes, or any other federal regulation on the matter.

The committee substitute requires the Texas Department of Agriculture to issue a hemp research permit to institutions of higher education that request such a permit.

The committee sub also alters the punishments for violating this potential law by charging second-time offenders with a Class B misdemeanor and further repeat offenders with a Class A misdemeanor.

If within six months of harvest, the committee sub allows the transfer of hemp to another person if the hemp is certified or approved.

HB 2818 also includes hemp under the term "agricultural commodity," according to the Texas Agricultural Code.

Current Status:

HB 2818 was voted favorably out of House Committee on Agriculture & Livestock with a 7-0 vote.

TFB **supports** HB 2818. (TFB 2023 Policy: Commodities- General Section 109, Page 7, Lines 26-28)

SB 147: Relating to the purchase of or acquisition of title to real property by certain aliens or foreign entities.

[Kolkhorst, Lois \(R\)](#)

Summary:

The committee substitute allows for U.S. citizens and dual citizens to purchase land; the prohibited real estate holdings do not include residence homesteads; details the enforcement mechanism.

Update:

SB 147 was passed by the Senate with an 18-12 vote and will now go over to the House of Representatives.

TFB is **neutral** on SB 147. TFB policy opposes foreign ownership only in cases where it creates unequal and unfair foreign trade advantages. In addition, TFB policy supports the right of landowners to sell or lease their property. Therefore, TFB policy is neutral on this legislation.

(TFB 2023 Policy: Real Property Rights Section 150, Page 61, lines 132-135; Real Property Rights Section 150, Page 60, Lines 109-110; Real Property Rights Section 150, Page 62, Lines 209-215.)

SB 505: Relating to imposing an additional fee for the registration of an electric vehicle.

[Nichols, Robert \(R\)](#)

Summary:

SB 505 amends the transportation code by creating an additional fee for electric vehicles. This fee is remitted when a vehicle is registered. Both fees will be deposited to the credit of the state highway fund.

Update:

SB 505 was passed by the House of Representatives with a 142-4 vote and will now be sent to the Governor.

TFB **supports** SB 505. (TFB 2023 Policy: Other Taxes Section 145, Page 47, Lines 35-37)

SB 624: Relating to the permitting of renewable energy generation facilities by the Public Utility Commission of Texas.

[Kolkhorst, Lois \(R\)](#)

Summary:

SB 624 establishes a regulatory framework for renewable energy projects (wind and solar developments) in Texas. Currently, there is little regulation or oversight over wind and solar developments at the state level. For wind turbines, the only statute at the state level requires wind turbines to be at least 25 nautical miles from

military airports. While there are multiple federal requirements, the renewable energy sector has practically no state oversight.

Update:

SB 624 passed the Senate with a 21-9 vote and is now heading to the House of Representatives.

TFB **supports** SB 624. (TFB 2023 Policy: Renewable Energy Section 147, Page 51, Lines 40-44)

New Bills

HB 4256: Relating to establishing and funding a grant program to plug leaking water wells in certain counties.

[Murr, Andrew \(R\)](#)

Summary:

HB 4256 establishes the Leaking Water Wells Grant Program. In certain rural counties, this fund is established to plug leaking water wells.

A water district may apply for a grant to plug leaking wells, such as those which are “located within 2,000 feet of a drinking water well, a water well for livestock or irrigation, or a sensitive wildlife area... [and] the plug, casing, completion interval or general integrity is known by the district to be deficient.”

This grant may only go toward the costs of paying the contracted work for the project.

Update:

HB 4256 was passed by the House of Representatives with a 131-17 vote and is now heading to the Senate.

TFB **supports** HB 4256. (TFB 2023 Policy: Water Quality Section 156, Page 82, Lines 32-34)

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