

TCAA CONFERENCE: ADVOCACY & OUTREACH IN THE COVID-19 ERA

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SUMMARY

- Unprecedented session ahead -- expect limited access to the capitol and members; Speaker's race – extremely important to cities and issues your communities/cities care about.
- Anti-local government environment led often by State Leadership
- Driven/Supported by organized opposition to local governments by political advocacy groups and special interests (Instigators of SB 29 efforts to silence local governments)
- Comptroller projects \$4.6 B budget deficit*

*source: [Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts](#)

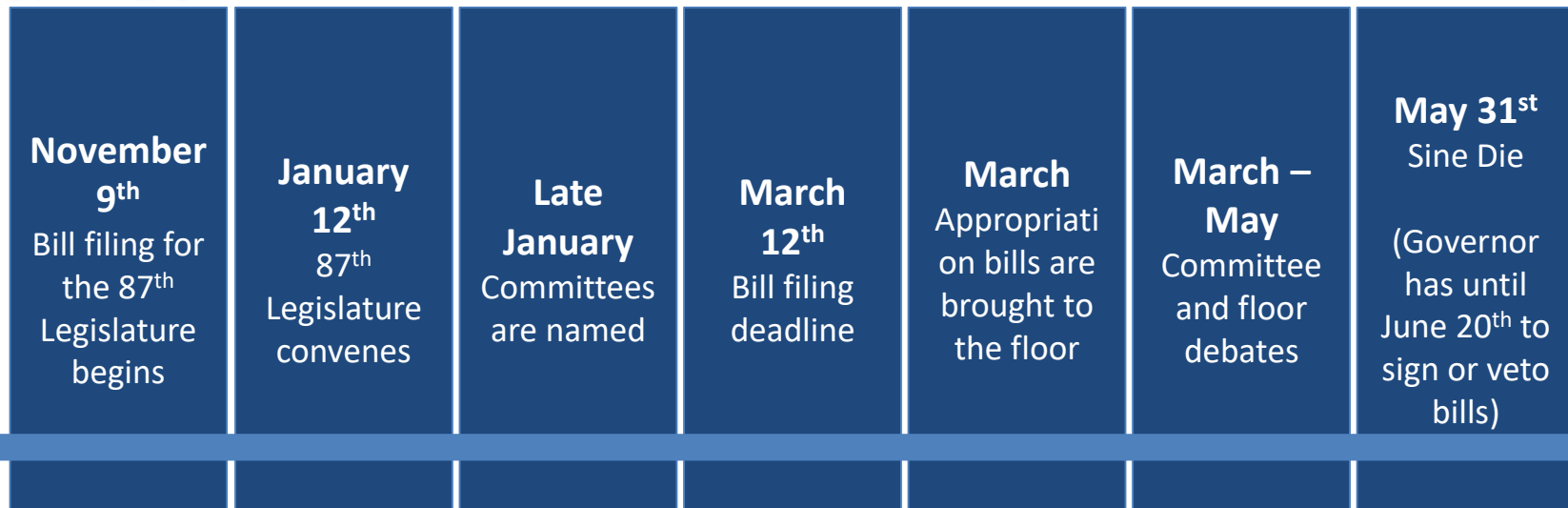


INTERIM ACTIVITY

- Interim committee meetings ceased in early March when the Governor declared a pandemic emergency (NO in person or remote public meetings conducted this interim since Covid)
- Speaker Bonnen issued guidelines for conducting business of House committees primarily through RFI process
- In July, House committees began issuing formal requests for information. Responses beginning to be posted online.
- No action yet from Senate Committees (Small non public working groups of Senators have met)



LEGISLATIVE TIMELINES



- The House will elect a speaker in January
- The Legislature can hold committee hearings in the early days of session, but per the constitution, legislators can't pass any bills during the first 60 calendar days — unless the governor declares it an emergency item or it's an emergency appropriation



POTENTIAL PARTISAN MAKEUP

	Republican	Democrat	Total
*House	83 current (project overall losses; 74)	67 current (+9 seats flip to 76 majority)	150
Senate	19 current (likely -1 to 18)	12 current (likely +1 to 19)	31



SPEAKER'S RACE

- No candidates announced yet
- Election day will be the pivotal moment
- The race is on now; continues until someone has 76 votes
- Formal election is first day of Session (Jan. 2020)
- Speaker appoints committee chairs and leads negotiations with Lt. Gov. Patrick and Gov. Abbott



OUTSIDE INTEREST GROUPS

- **Texas Public Policy Foundation (TPPF)**
 - conservative “think tank” located in Austin; run by **Tim Dunn**
 - mission: promote and defend liberty and free enterprise
 - litigation division (who sues cities); publishes lots of reports
 - Often a “pay to play” organization that special interests use as cover for their legislative proposals (Airbnb, energy companies, etc)
- **Empower Texans**
 - focused on lower taxes, spending restraint, and free market
 - **Michael Quinn Sullivan** serves as president
 - Operates a PAC and political advocacy at local levels
- **Texans for Fiscal Responsibility**
 - grassroots advocacy (part of Empower Texans)
 - publishes scorecard to grade legislators



BROADBAND

- The pandemic has exacerbated the gap between rural & urban broadband availability
- 800,000+ Texans do not have adequate broadband infrastructure
- Cities have led the way in expanding broadband access in a variety of ways during Covid. Cities will be critical to getting a good and workable system in place.
- In the past, Texas cities *could* provide wi-fi service. However, a 2015 FCC order called that into question:
 - The FCC redefined broadband from an “information service” to a “telecommunications service”



LOCAL GOV'T AUTHORITY

- The pandemic has tested the authority of the governor, city and county government officials, and state district judges
- In early March, cities acted before the State to act to pass virus control measures
- Ultimately, the Governor issued executive orders which superseded local orders
- Expect legislation next session which will limit the emergency order authority of local governments



UPCOMING ISSUES: BUDGET & COVID RESPONSE

• **Budget**

- Zero-based budgeting for all agencies
- Decline in sales tax revenues (declining revenue across board)
- Decline in oil production (i.e. severance tax revenues)
- Increase in Medicaid Healthcare Expenditures
- Increase in public school spending (HB 3 costs plus Covid items)
- Increase in unemployment insurance expenditures
- Unemployment system and other assistance program costs

• **COVID-19 response**

- *Public health*
- *Economic response / Recovery*
- Governor / Local government emergency response authority



UPCOMING ISSUES

- **Redistricting** – Census Dept now says April issuance of Texas numbers; Legislative Redistricting Board; potential special session
- **Criminal Justice / Law Enforcement / Policing**
 - Qualified immunity
 - Police unions / Civil Service Statutes
 - Sandra Bland Act Continuation / George Floyd Act (already proposed)
 - Diverting PD funds to civilian response (i.e. homelessness, mental health, substance abuse)
 - Body camera grant funding and statewide records retention and release statute
 - "Big Three" are pushing for legislation next year that would freeze property tax revenues and limit annexation authority further for cities that reduce or restructure police budgets (lacking many substantive details)
- **General Government Issues** (areas most likely to be scaled back)
 - Land use
 - Utilities
 - Transportation



KEY TO SUCCESS

- *Keep engaging your delegation and community; tell your story and the provide the straight- forward facts on impacts of issues to City/Community.*
- Increase citizens involvement (community advocacy)
- Increase business involvement (highlight partnerships)
- The Legislature will be sharply focused on the budget/covid response and there will be little, if any, time for a wide variety of issues.
- *Make your items relevant to issues Legislature will address. Pare down your wish list. The bar for getting your issue considered has been raised.*

THANK YOU

QUESTIONS?

FOCUSED  **ADVOCACY**