

**GOVERNOR:**

**February 19<sup>th</sup> Update on the State's Response to the Winter Weather**

**Events** – On February 19<sup>th</sup>, Governor Greg Abbott provided an update on the state's ongoing response to winter weather events throughout the state. The governor laid out four immediate priorities for the State of Texas, as well as what the state is doing to restore power and water and ensure that food and fuel demands are met throughout Texas. Governor Abbott said, "Thanks to the efforts of linemen, plumbers, first responders, truckers, farmers, ranchers, grocery store workers, refinery workers, and more, we continue to make tremendous strides to overcome the challenges of the past week. We know that this past week has been challenging for far too many Texans. Our state agencies are working around the clock to restore power and water, and to ensure Texans have food and supplies. I want to reassure the people of Texas that we are using every tool at our disposal to help those in need. We have overcome challenges in the past, and we will overcome this challenge together."

**Power Outages** - The first immediate priority is continuing to restore power to Texas homes. While there are no longer any residential power outages due to lack of power generation, there are still some Texans without power due to downed lines or the need for manual reconnection. The Governor assured Texans without power that local providers are working diligently to restore electricity.

**Restoring Water Service** - The second priority is supporting local officials as they work to restore water for Texans. The governor has issued waivers to cut red tape to accelerate this process. The Texas Commission of Environmental Quality (TCEQ) is standing up a phone bank for local water utilities who are unable to get water testing at their contracted labs. This phone bank will connect local facilities with another lab that can test their water quickly. TCEQ has partnered with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to stand up three mobile water testing labs. In addition, the state is partnering with local river authorities to use their water labs to assist locals with bacteria sampling. Texas has also partnered with the state of Arkansas to use their labs. Additionally, TCEQ is coordinating with larger local labs that have testing availability to assist smaller municipalities. The governor noted that he held a call with the Texas State Board of Plumbing Examiners (TSBPE) to discuss ways to quickly repair burst pipes for Texans across the state. As of noon today, over 320 plumbers have renewed their license, and TSBPE is coordinating with multiple out-of-state plumbing companies to send additional plumbers to Texas. The Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) is continuing to deliver bottled water to communities facing water shortages or water quality issues. Over 1.7 million bottles of water have been delivered to communities across the state.

**Availability of Food and Supplies** - The third priority is ensuring Texans have the food and supplies they need. The governor noted that he has already suspended some regulations relating to commercial vehicles, which will speed the delivery of food and other resources to communities across the state. The state is taking steps to open new fuel supply lines to ensure truckers, agriculture producers, emergency responders, and anyone else that runs on diesel will be able to get food to stores and supplies to Texans in need. The governor announced that he is allowing the use of off-road road diesel on Texas roads. Governor Abbott and Texas Comptroller Glenn Hegar are requesting fuel waivers from the EPA and the IRS to allow for the use of all forms of diesel on Texas roads to keep our truckers moving. As roads conditions continue to improve, more food and supplies will be delivered to grocery stores across the state.

**Refineries** - The fourth priority is helping refineries get back up and running to provide Texans with the fuel they need. In addition to fuel regulation suspensions previously mentioned, the governor spoke with oil and gas refineries earlier today to work on strategies to get their operations up and running again.

**Request for USDA Disaster Designation** – On February 19<sup>th</sup>, Governor Greg Abbott requested a USDA disaster designation for Cameron, Hidalgo, and Willacy counties in response to severe winter weather that has impacted the state. This designation would make federal assistance, such as emergency loans, available to agricultural producers who have suffered losses in designated counties, as well as in counties that are contiguous to a designated county. As additional production losses or losses to quality are assessed, the governor will request that USDA extend its disaster designation to additional counties in Texas. Governor Abbott's request letter said, "Texas agricultural producers continue to be greatly affected by the severe ice and freezing temperatures; these weather conditions have substantially affected producers and caused severe production losses. These producers are in need of U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) assistance to return to normal operations. For example, early estimates made by Texas Citrus Mutual show Texas citrus sustained approximately \$305.0 million loss to the crop in Cameron, Hidalgo, and Willacy counties. Total damage assessments are still being calculated, but daily agriculture operations across the entire state have been slowed both by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and by loss of electricity and continued freezing temperatures caused by severe winter weather."

[Here](#) is a link to the governor's letter.

**February 21<sup>st</sup> Update on the State Response to Winter Weather Disruptions**

– On February 21<sup>st</sup>, Governor Greg Abbott held a press conference in San Antonio where he provided an update on the state's efforts to provide water and other resources to Texans across the state. The governor's press conference was held at Port San Antonio, where members of the National Guard are currently unloading water and other resources to distribute to communities in Texas. The governor noted that power and water are continuing to be restored

throughout Texas and that multiple state agencies are working together to ensure communities have access to water, food, and other resources as communities begin to recover from the severe winter storm. Governor Abbott said, "We are making great progress in our recovery efforts from this winter storm, but many Texans are still without water, food, and other supplies, which is why the state is stepping up to make sure Texans have the resources they need to provide for their families. I thank our local, state, and federal partners for working together to address the needs of Texans and expedite our recovery process. I also want to thank our utility workers for providing crucial services to Texans who have experienced power outages and burst pipes. Together, we will continue to overcome this challenge." Information provided included:

- The state has deployed trucks and aircraft to deliver water to communities, including 162 truck deliveries that have delivered a total of 2 million bottles of water and 1.4 million bottles of water that have been delivered by plane and helicopter.
- State agencies are working with local officials to set up staging sites for distribution.
- The state has also suspended size, weight, hours-of-service requirements, and more to get more commercial trucks on the road to deliver supplies across the state.
- Meals Ready to Eat (MREs), blankets, and generators have been provided to communities in need.
- In addition, the governor has waived regulations to allow the use of unlicensed kitchens to prepare meals to donate to Texans so long as they abide by guidance issued by the Texas Department of State Health Services.

Governor Abbott also mentioned that he is working with members of the legislature to address skyrocketing energy bills that resulted from a temporary spike in the energy market. He said that they are working quickly to calculate the total cost of these bills and find ways that the state can help reduce this burden. The governor stated that the Public Utility Commission has issued a moratorium on customer disconnections for non-payment and will temporarily restrict providers from issuing invoices. This pause will ensure that the state has time to address these bills and develop a solution for Texans.

**Statewide Address on Recent Power Outages** – On February 24<sup>th</sup>, Governor Greg Abbott delivered a televised statewide address on the state's response to recent power outages caused by the severe winter weather as well as the actions the state is taking to ensure the reliability of Texas' power infrastructure. The speech was given from the State Emergency Operations Center. Governor Abbott said, "Tragic does not even begin to describe the devastation and the suffering that you have endured over the past week. Too many of you were shivering in your own homes with no power, no heat, and no water. I want to thank the countless Texans who stepped up to help those in need. As is often the case in Texas, the worst of events brings out the best in Texans. For those of you still hurting, I want you to know that the state is using every resource to fix

this problem. Many of you are angry. You have every right to be. I'm angry too. At a time when essential services were needed the most, the system broke. You deserve answers. You will get those answers.

**ERCOT** - The Electric Reliability Council of Texas, known as ERCOT, manages the flow of power in Texas. Before the storm hit, ERCOT repeatedly assured the state and the public that ERCOT was prepared. Those assurances turned out to be false. We now know that power generators of all sources were not prepared for this severe winter weather. We have also learned that ERCOT operators should have acted quicker to stabilize the grid and to prevent power generators from being knocked offline. Our task now is to take the lessons of the past week and the anger that we all feel and channel them into immediate action.

**Response to the Storm** - I made responding to this storm an emergency item this legislative session. I am already working on solutions with the Lt. governor, the speaker, and the legislature.

**First** is protecting you. It is outrageous for residents to be saddled with skyrocketing power bills. The state is already investigating multiple electric providers about these spikes. Also, we have ordered that Texans will not have their power shut off because of unpaid bills until the legislature has time to act on this.

**Second**, ERCOT must be overhauled. Five ERCOT board members have already resigned, including the Chair and Vice-Chair. But more must be done. Tomorrow, the legislature begins comprehensive investigations of ERCOT. I am already working with the legislature on reforms to add more power to the grid and to ensure that we never run out of power again. Also, the Office of the Attorney General has launched a formal investigation into ERCOT.

**Third**, the fact is, power generation from all sources buckled under the harsh, freezing winter weather. That includes natural gas, coal, nuclear, as well as wind and solar. Each of these power sources failed to fully produce because of inadequate safeguards. That is why I have made it a legislative priority to mandate and to fund the winterization of the Texas power infrastructure. This will protect our power grid from future winter weather events.

**Conclusion** - No words can fix what happened or ease the pain that you endured. But I assure you this - this legislative session will not end until we fix these problems.

And we will ensure that the tragic events of the past week are never repeated. Your safety is my top concern. I pray that God continues to bless you all."

**SENATE:** The Texas Senate was in session on Tuesday this week.

**Lt. Governor Dan Patrick's Legislative Priorities** – On February 23<sup>rd</sup>, Lt. Governor Dan Patrick announced his top priorities for the 2021 Legislative Session. The list reflects his own priorities as well as priorities from senators and Texans around the state. The Lt. governor's priorities are designed to protect taxpayers and the Texas economy as it rebuilds following the pandemic and to secure Texas' future, including addressing power failures in the recent winter storm. As always, the legislation he is championing also includes continued

support for life, liberty and conservative Texas values. Lt. Governor Patrick said, “Since the legislature adjourned in 2019, Texas has faced some of the greatest challenges in our history. In fact, several of my priority bills changed in the last few days in response to issues that emerged from the winter storm last week. I have also prioritized legislation that reflects the principles and values of the Texas conservative majority. I am confident these priorities address issues that are critical to Texans at this time. In addition to these priorities, there are other bills that also have my strong support including the Medical Compensation Transparency Act (paid or incurred) and additional legislation to stop human trafficking. I also support the legislative proposal to review statewide health data in light of the pandemic and proposed legislation that will speed the recovery of the restaurant industry, including maintaining ‘liquor-to-go.’ I support the priorities laid out by Governor Greg Abbott as well as other legislation to make sure the Texas economy continues to come back stronger than ever following the pandemic. I will be working to make sure this legislation passes and that we do all that we can to make our state, our cities and all our communities safe and secure going forward.”

**Priority Bills by Number:**

- Senate Bill 1 – The State Budget
- Senate Bill 2 – ERCOT Reform
- Senate Bill 3 – Power Grid Stability
- Senate Bill 4 – Star Spangled Banner Protection Act
- Senate Bill 5 – Statewide Broadband Access
- Senate Bill 6 – Pandemic Liability Protection Act
- Senate Bill 7 – Election & Ballot Security
- Senate Bill 8 – The Heartbeat Bill
- Senate Bill 9 – Abortion Ban Trigger
- Senate Bill 10 – Stop Taxpayer Funded Lobbying
- Senate Bill 11 – Appellate Court Reorganization
- Senate Bill 12 – Protect Free Speech on Social Media
- Senate Bill 13 – Oil & Gas Investment Protection
- Senate Bill 14 – Business Freedom and Uniformity Act
- Senate Bill 15 – Ban Sale of Personal Data from Certain State Agencies
- Senate Bill 16 – Protect State-held Personal Data
- Senate Bill 17 – Protect Texas Trucking
- Senate Bill 18 – Protect Second Amendment Businesses
- Senate Bill 19 – Stop Corporate Gun Boycotts
- Senate Bill 20 – Second Amendment Protections for Travelers
- Senate Bill 21 – Bail Reform
- Senate Bill 22 – First Responders Pandemic Care Act
- Senate Bill 23 – Stop Local Police Defunding
- Senate Bill 24 – Law Enforcement Transparency Act
- Senate Bill 25 – Family Nursing Home Visitation Rights
- Senate Bill 26 – Protect Our Freedom to Worship
- Senate Bill 27 – Expanding Virtual Learning Options

- Senate Bill 28 – Charter School Equity Act
- Senate Bill 29 – Fair Sports for Women & Girls
- Senate Bill 30 – Remove Racist Restrictions from Real Estate Deeds
- Senate Bill 31 – Senate Redistricting Act

**A Safe & Secure Texas Future:**

- Senate Bill 2 – ERCOT Reform
- Senate Bill 3 – Power Grid Stability
- Senate Bill 5 – Statewide Broadband Access
- Senate Bill 7 – Election & Ballot Security
- Senate Bill 15 – Ban Sale of Personal Data from Certain State Agencies
- Senate Bill 16 – Protect State-held Personal Data
- Senate Bill 21 – Bail Reform
- Senate Bill 22 – First Responders Pandemic Care Act
- Senate Bill 23 – Stop Local Police Defunding
- Senate Bill 24 – Law Enforcement Transparency Act
- Senate Bill 27 – Expand Virtual Learning Options
- Senate Bill 28 – Charter School Equity Act

**Life, Liberty and Conservative Texas Values:**

- Senate Bill 4 – Star Spangled Banner Protection Act
- Senate Bill 8 – The Heartbeat Bill
- Senate Bill 9 – Abortion Ban Trigger
- Senate Bill 12 – Protect Free Speech on Social Media
- Senate Bill 18 – Protect Second Amendment Businesses
- Senate Bill 19 – Stop Corporate Gun Boycotts
- Senate Bill 20 – Second Amendment Protections for Travelers
- Senate Bill 25 – Family Nursing Home Visitation Rights
- Senate Bill 26 – Protect Our Freedom to Worship
- Senate Bill 29 – Fair Sports for Women & Girls
- Senate Bill 30 – Removing Racist Restrictions from Real Estate Deeds

**Protecting Taxpayers & the Texas Economy:**

- Senate Bill 1 – State Budget
- Senate Bill 6 – Pandemic Liability Protection Act
- Senate Bill 10 – Stop Taxpayer Funded Lobbying
- Senate Bill 13 – Oil and Gas Investment Protection
- Senate Bill 14 – Business Freedom & Uniformity Act
- Senate Bill 17 – Protect Texas Trucking

**Next Week:** The Senate will reconvene on Tuesday, March 2, 2021 at 3:00 p.m.

**HOUSE:** The House was in session on Tuesday and Wednesday this week.

**House Committee Schedule** – The House announced its permanent committee schedule and locations:

**Mondays:**

8:30 a.m. – Appropriations Committee – E1.030

10:00 a.m. – Defense and Veterans’ Affairs Committee – E2.028  
10:00 a.m. – Juvenile Justice & Family Issues Committee – E2.014  
10:00 a.m. – Ways & Means Committee – JHR 140  
2:00 p.m. – Criminal Justice Committee – E2.010  
2:00 p.m. - Culture, Recreation & Tourism Committee – E2.036  
2:00 p.m. – Energy Resources Committee – JHR 120  
2:00 p.m. – Environmental Regulation Committee – E1.026

**Tuesdays:**

8:00 a.m. – Business & Industry Committee – E2.028  
8:00 a.m. – Human Services Committee – E2.030  
8:00 a.m. – Land & Resource Management Committee – E2.010  
8:00 a.m. – Natural Resources Committee – JHR 120  
8:00 a.m. – Public Education Committee – E1.004/JHR 140  
10:30 a.m. – Insurance Committee – E2.014  
2:00 p.m. – Transportation Committee – E1.004/HJR 140

**Wednesdays:**

8:00 a.m. – Corrections Committee – E2.026  
8:00 a.m. – International Relations & Economic Development Comm. – E2.012  
8:00 a.m. – Judiciary & Civil Jurisprudence Committee – E2.014  
8:00 a.m. – Pensions, Investments & Financial Services Committee – E2.036  
8:00 a.m. – Public Health Committee – JHR 140  
10:30 a.m. – Licensing & Administrative Procedures Committee – JHR 120  
10:30 a.m. – Urban Affairs Committee – E1.026

**Thursdays:**

8:00 a.m. – Agriculture & Livestock Committee – E2.010  
8:00 a.m. – Elections Committee – E2.028  
8:00 a.m. – Higher Education Committee – JHR 120  
8:00 a.m. – State Affairs Committee – E1.004/JHR 140  
10:30 a.m. – County Affairs Committee – E2.014  
10:30 a.m. – Homeland Security & Public Safety Committee – E2.030  
2:00 p.m. – Redistricting Committee – E1.004

**Next Week:** The House will reconvene on Tuesday, March 2, 2021 at 2:00 p.m. Speaker Phelan announced that the House will be in session on Tuesday and Wednesday next week. He instructed all committees to have an organizational meeting next week if they have not already had one.

**PUBLIC EDUCATION:**

**Federally-Required Standardized Tests** – On February 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Biden administration said that states must administer federally required standardized tests this year, but schools will not be held accountable for the results. It is allowing states to give shorter, remote, or delayed versions of the exams. The decision means that schools will have to find ways to safely administer tests to students, many of whom are still learning remotely. The letter to state education leaders was sent by Ian Rosenblum, acting assistant education secretary. The letter said, “President Biden’s first priority is to safely re-open schools and get

students back to classrooms, learning face-to-face from teachers with their fellow students. To be successful once schools have re-opened, we need to understand the impact COVID-19 has had on learning and identify what resources and supports students need. We must also specifically be prepared to address the educational inequities that have been exacerbated by the pandemic, including by using student learning data to enable states, school districts, and schools to target resources and supports to the students with the greatest needs. In addition, parents need information on how their children are doing. State assessment and accountability systems play an important role in advancing educational equity. At the same time, it is clear that the pandemic requires significant flexibility for the 2020-2021 school year so that states can respond to the unique circumstances they are facing; keep students, staff, and their families safe; and maintain their immediate focus on supporting students' social, emotional, and academic development." The letter notes that the department will consider flexibility on a state-by-state basis.

[Here](#) is a link to the letter.

**Texas Early Learning Council** – On February 24<sup>th</sup>, Governor Greg Abbott named Reagan Miller as Chair of the Texas Early Learning Council for a term to expire at the pleasure of the governor. The Texas Early Learning Council serves as Texas' state advisory council as required by the federal Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007. The council utilizes its breadth of stakeholder representation to increase coordination and collaboration across state agencies and local program and service providers in order to improve the quality of and access to early childhood services across Texas. In 2019, the council led a statewide birth-five needs assessment and developed the Early Learning Strategic Plan as part of Texas' Preschool Development Grant project.

**Reagan Miller** of Austin is the Director of Child Care & Early Learning Division at the Texas Workforce Commission. Miller is a member of the National Association of State Child Care Administrators. She received a bachelor's degree in International Studies and Economics from Southwestern University.

**Next Week:**

**Tuesday, March 2, 2021**

**8:00 a.m. – House Public Education Committee** will meet in E1.004 for an organizational meeting and to hear invited testimony from the Commissioner of Education.

**STATEWIDE – COVID-19 RESPONSE:**

**DSHS Weekly Vaccine Distribution Update** – On February 19<sup>th</sup> the Department of State Health Services issued its weekly update on Vaccine distribution in Texas for the week of February 22<sup>nd</sup>. It said, "As Texas thaws from the winter storms, COVID-19 vaccine will again be distributed across the state in larger amounts. Texas providers have been allocated 591,920 first doses (compared to 407,650 first doses the week of February 12<sup>th</sup>) of COVID-19 vaccine from the



federal government for the week of February 22<sup>nd</sup>. The Texas Department of State Health Services has instructed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to ship those doses to 563 providers (compared to 302) in 230 counties (158 counties last week) across Texas, including 84,240 doses for large vaccine clinics in Harris, Dallas and Tarrant counties supported by the federal government. *(Note: One-half of the additional doses are going to the three super sites that were supposed to open last week but ended up as water distribution sites instead of vaccine sites.)* The added first doses directed to the federal sites over the next three weeks will allow Texas to allocate additional doses to communities where vaccine supplies have been much more limited, leading to vaccine distribution to the largest number of counties of any week so far. In addition to the first doses mentioned above, the state is ordering 516,830 doses intended as the second dose for people first vaccinated a few weeks ago. People who had second dose appointments delayed by winter weather should rest assured knowing that vaccine will be available, and their appointments will be rescheduled. Even if they receive the second dose outside of the recommended six-week time frame, they will get the full protection of the second dose and will not need an additional booster shot. Here is some additional information provided:

- The federal vaccine tracking system shows more than 100,000 first doses and 300,000 second doses intended for delivery last week still awaiting shipment due to weather conditions around out-of-state warehouses and across the country. Those doses are expected to be delivered in the first half of this week, followed by the vaccine allocated for this week.
- Texas providers have administered more than 4.3 million doses of vaccine. More than 3 million people have received at least one dose, and almost 1.3 million have been fully vaccinated.
- Texas continues to vaccinate health care workers, residents of long-term care facilities, people 65 and older and those with medical conditions that put them at greater risk of hospitalization and death from COVID-19.
- Vaccine remains limited based on the capacity of the manufacturers to produce it, so it will take time for Texas to receive enough vaccine for all the people in the priority populations who want to be vaccinated.
- Per a recent label change, each vial of Pfizer vaccine now contains six doses leading to a minimum order of 1,170.

**Save Our Seniors Initiative** – On February 25<sup>th</sup>, Governor Greg Abbott held a press conference in Corpus Christi where he announced the statewide Save Our Seniors initiative to vaccinate homebound seniors across Texas. During the press conference, the governor also commended the Corpus Christi Fire Department, Meals on Wheels of Corpus Christi, and the City of Corpus Christi for the success of their homebound senior vaccination program which serves as a model for the statewide initiative. Governor Abbott said, "A key part of our mission in the fight against COVID-19 is to vaccinate seniors and those who are most at risk, and senior vaccination programs like the one in Corpus Christi are crucial to accomplishing this mission. I am proud of the work being done by the

Corpus Christi Fire Department, Meals On Wheels, and city leadership to identify and vaccinate homebound seniors in their community. By implementing a similar model throughout the state, and with the support of the Texas National Guard, we will reach more homebound seniors in communities across Texas and provide them with these life-saving vaccines." As part of the statewide Save Our Seniors Initiative, the state will deploy more than 1,100 National Guardsmen to assist communities in vaccinating homebound seniors. The guardsmen will be broken up into teams that will deploy across the state. Some members of these teams will focus on identifying and registering homebound seniors for the program while others will visit homes and administer vaccines. The state is dedicating up to 8,000 vaccines to this initiative for the first week and will work with organizations like Meals On Wheels and nursing groups to identify homebound seniors who volunteer to be vaccinated. The program will launch Monday.