



I mentioned in last month's column that the Texas legislature meets for 140 days in every odd-numbered year. Today, I want to break that down a bit and discuss how those 140 days are scheduled, as well as reflect on Governor Abbott's State of the State address from February 1.

During the first days of the legislative session, the Texas House of Representatives meets first to swear in its members and choose a Speaker of the House. Once this is done, the house members propose and vote on the rules that will guide the session. From there, members are allowed to introduce bills and resolutions and act on emergency appropriation requests and other emergency items identified by the Governor.

During the next 30 days, house committees will meet to discuss and debate bills that were proposed during the previous 30 days. It is during this time that committees hold hearings and ask citizens, experts, business and industry experts to testify during committee debate on the bills being considered. This process is very important, as it helps inform the member of how the bill impacts his or her district and the state.

If a bill makes it through committee hearings, it is sent to the full chamber for debate and consideration during the time remaining in the session. If the bill is passed by the house, it is then sent to the Senate for consideration. The senate will then begin a similar process to consider the bill. If both chambers come to an agreement on a bill, it is sent to the Governor for his signature, which effectively makes it a law (bills may originate in the Senate also, following a similar process).

The governor also directs the legislature to act on certain issues deemed as emergency items. He discussed these in his State of the State address on February 1. In order of announcement, these items are: providing broadband access for all Texans; ensuring that cities are not capable of defunding local police departments; the Damon Allen Act, a bill aimed at reforming the bail system so that dangerous criminals are not allowed back on the streets; ensuring the integrity of all Texas elections; and to provide civil liability protections for those who operated their business safely during the pandemic. These issues will be given priority as the legislature works through this session.

Though the time spent in session is planned out in blocks as described above, that does not preclude members from returning to and working from their districts, especially during the first 30 days. This gives members ample time to meet with constituents in the district. I've been able to spend time since the session began meeting with local elected officials, first responders, and hospital officials to better understand how our communities are responding to COVID and to discuss ideas about how the state can help these communities. I've also met with business leaders and citizens to receive feedback about how certain regulations can help or hurt our local

economies. The information gathered from these meetings is vital to informing how I can best represent my constituents – I need your input to govern effectively.

Lastly, I want to thank everyone who extended thoughts, prayers, and well wishes to myself, my family, and my team as I was sworn in as a member of the legislature last month. Again, I appreciate and am inspired by your support.

God bless you and God bless Texas.