

2020- Mid-August – Legislative Report

BOB TURNER RURAL ISSUES CONSULTING

Voss, Texas 76888 \*cell text 325 669 1717 Austin, Texas

Let me show you only one or two of the unforeseen hang ups of governing in times like this. In the past week – some of the Freedom Caucus members opposed and questioned the proposed process for the conduct of those Sunset Commission Review hearings which are required this year. The key spokesman in leading the opposition was Senator Bob Hall. Due to the disagreement and ensuing argument posed by this small opposition group – Chairman John Cyrier cancelled the meeting scheduled for Wednesday August 19<sup>th</sup>. The Texas State Sunset Commission is made up of five members of the senate. They are appointed by the Lt. Governor. There are also five members of the Texas House- and they are appointed by the Speaker of The Texas House. There are also two “at large” members on the Commission. Representative John Cyrier serves as chair of this most important advisory group. Keep in mind that there has long been a procedure - or - safety net process to provide continuity of operation for any state agency – whose extending legislation failed to pass the full legislative process during a regular session of the legislature. The Coronavirus Pandemic situation has precluded large public meetings – such as that required to approve actions of the Sunset Commission. In view of this – the Sunset Committee devised a method of gaining virtual input from legislators – and the general citizenship of the state.

The issue of Interim Committee hearings also presents a very challenging scenario. The Lt Governor provides a list of issues to be

considered by each Senate Committee - during this interim period. The Speaker of the House does the same thing for regular standing House committees. Keep in mind that this public hearing process has traditionally provided many of the topics which later become legislative bills to be filed during the upcoming legislative session. The same situation exists – no large crowds – no public hearings of that magnitude. Therefore – virtual means are being utilized to allow some scrutiny and suggestion as to what should be most considered.

Bi-partisan legislative governing seems to be a fond memory of our past. “Negotiation” is not a four-letter word. Working together to solve the state’s challenging problems is the only way we can arrive at good decisions and effective governing. To further compound the issue of governing -there is no agreement between elements of leadership and the medical professionals. There is even no agreement among certain governmental elements – as to the overall seriousness of the Coronavirus. This leaves many citizens at a loss for factual information – or for guidance. This is creating a MAJOR problem in coping with the challenges of public and higher education – as school opening time is upon us. The threat of withholding public education funds if every school does not follow the one size fits everyone guidelines - definitely challenges state and local education leaders. We are risking a backward step in the education of our children – if some decisions are not made.

On the bright side – most businesses in many areas of the state are showing definite improvement. Sales tax collections by many municipalities has shown improvement. Unemployment numbers are improved (somewhat) in areas of the state. All is not doom – NOR – gloom. The ingenuity being demonstrated by the business community is commendable. Might add that oil prices are staying fairly stable – in the \$41. - \$42. range – which has lent some confidence to the industry. I think it highly possible that when the legislature convenes in January –

they will – first of all – be dealing with the \$4.5 BILLION deficit in the current budget. I hear rumbling that the legislature might consider only creating and approving a budget for one year (2022) of the next biennium. It appears that this would relieve some of the budgetary pressure off Comptroller Glenn Hegar - the legislature and state leadership in general.

I heard a great comment at the capitol the other day – “Where is Lt Governor Bob Bullock when we need his strong leadership”? – Well – he is doing us no good at all across I-35 in the State Cemetery – is he?  
God Bless Texas