

Midsummer – 2020 - Leg Report

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Dealing with our state government issues is continuing to change and become more complex. With the spiking of active and hospitalized cases of COVID-19 in the state – governmental operations are presenting new challenges. You and I know the impact it is having on our personal lives – and upon our own business operations. I am finding that there are totally unexpected situations when it comes to running the business and daily operations of Texas.

What are normally simple budget issues – legislative issues and the long- term issue of governing – are no longer routine or simple. Keep in mind that almost every legislative office at the capitol is locked and dark – and the legislators and staff persons who we normally lean on – are not there. Most of these persons are home bound – and - attempting to handle the daily governmental issues - via phone and computer – from their dining room tables or personal offices.

There are some few offices open – even though with almost no staff to help you with your day to day issues. Have you been to a Doctors office or hospital recently? Entering the capitol is very similar – with DPS troops at each entry. The past weekend – daily testing found another 10 DPS troops testing positive. This required totally shutting the capitol down – and a complete sanitization process. A sanitization procedure there is very involved. Due to the sensitive and valuable nature of the artwork etc. – normal spray fumigation cannot be accomplished.

Those of us who work there – and have - for a number of years - no longer have access to the cafeteria or capitol library – while awaiting the next meeting or appointment. We must call a legislator's office –

make an appointment with them- or their staff (IF THEY ARE EVEN THERE) – and check in with DPS as you enter the capitol. Then – when the visit is complete – you exit the capitol building. Unlike past times – when you might simply/fortunately bump into the Representative or Senator in the hall- or cafeteria. These accidental meetings no longer occur since most of the legislators are not at the capitol.

It appears that the usual interim committee planning public meetings will not occur- but phone meetings between the interim committee legislators may be the only actual decision-making activity. Perhaps the most confusing issue that I see coming down the pike – will be the next legislative session – itself. Several possible formats are being discussed – between leadership and members. But – perhaps the most challenging seems to be how can the constitutional requirement of open meetings be met – with current limited public meeting limitations. The purpose of our committee open public meetings of course is to provide every citizen opportunity to have equal input in the governmental process. State leadership - as well as we old timers – have yet to arrive at a manner that will ensure constitutional mandates and expectations can be met.

There is lots of speculation as to how it will be possible to conduct the upcoming legislative session. House Administrative personnel are looking into some sort of plexiglass/plastic dividers between the 150 desks on the House floor. Something similar in nature to the divider in retail establishments between the customer and the store staff and sales personnel. The challenges and problems required to ensure that health standards be met seem impossible to deal with.

One of the interesting things I have found is when legislators – or staffers meet – their speculations and predictions are stated – followed by this statement –“Your guess is as good as mine”. It is obvious that

Texas has never faced this type challenge in the past. There are no guidelines – and no institutional knowledge that covers the challenges that a new set of legislators will be facing. When the 87th Texas Legislature convenes on the 12th of January 2021 - there obviously will still be many “firsts” – and many unanswered questions.

As required by our constitution – we must deal with budget amendments that will be required due to our current pandemic event. Next – of course – the budget for the next 2-year period must be drafted - and certified by the State Comptroller. As you can readily see – with so many business (of all types) closed – and oil prices in the gutter – Texas State revenue is dramatically below previous annual levels. Hopefully – with current slight increases in the opening of retail businesses - coupled with the slight increases in crude oil prices – state revenue may be showing some signs of improvement. The unknowns of not only our economic future – but that of the world financial picture will require very keen insight and rational level-headed thought. There will be no time for playing “potty” and meaningless personal gain games. We are laying this requirement on legislators who have never experienced a similar situation in the entire history of our state.

Our newly elected legislators will need your patience and understanding as they face a whole list of unanswered questions.

To quote former Lt. Governor Bob Bullock – “ GOD BLESS TEXAS ”.