

# 88th Legislative Third Called Special Session Update

Senator Bob Hall

The 88th Legislature began its third special session on October 9, 2023. Governor Abbott's proclamation includes the need for legislation to create education savings accounts for schoolchildren in Texas, improve border security by reducing illegal immigration, and prohibiting COVID-19 vaccine mandates in private businesses. These critical issues are vital to the continued success and security of Texas.

Our work in the Senate began with committee meetings to hear bills that would address these concerns. We were able to hear testimony provided by both experts and constituents who are being affected by these issues. Serving on both the Finance Committee and Health and Human Services Committee allowed me a front row seat to ask important questions about the legislation being considered during this special session.

Each of the five bills that have been brought to the floor have positive aspects. They also contain language that should induce caution. Some of these bills simply do not go far enough in protecting your rights but do take steps in the right direction. It is my belief that the government should be fully transparent to the people it represents. This is why I have provided summaries on each of the five bills that were passed through the Senate below. These summaries will outline the good, the bad, and the legislation that almost got it right.

## Education

Senate Bill 1 establishes education savings accounts of \$8,000 for eligible students to use for approved education-related expenses. On receipt of more acceptable applications than open positions, priority shall be given to the educationally disadvantaged (i.e., those who qualify for free or reduced lunch), those whose household income is between 185 and 500 percent of the federal poverty line, and those with a disability. Though \$8,000 might put private school within reach for additional families, it remains to be seen whether actual choice will be achieved. Additionally, this bill could lead to increased costs over time.



With the state providing up to \$8,000, private school tuition and fees are likely to increase in accordance, just as the federal backing of student loans has contributed to the inflation of college tuition. In the Senate Finance Committee, we heard testimony on Senate Bill 2 which provides additional public school funding. Senate Bill 2 increases the basic allotment and creates a new Teacher Retention Allotment.

Specifically, this legislation increases the basic allotment by \$75 and provides pay increases to classroom teachers across the state of Texas who devote their time to enriching young minds. Specifically, teachers in school districts with less than 5,000 students will receive a \$10,000 retention bonus during the 2023-2024 school year and teachers in districts with more than 5,000 students will receive a \$3,000 bonus.

The State of Texas has a constitutionally outlined duty to "establish and make suitable provision for the support and maintenance of an efficient system of public free school." (Texas Constitution, Article VII) In the past year, Texas has made historic investments in the Texas education system by increasing funding 30% (\$94 billion total quoted in Senate Finance Committee on October 9, 2023.). Texas is only able to make such an investment as the result of a healthy economy. Tax dollars do not belong to the state legislature, but rather those funds are entrusted to the state legislature to fulfill its constitutional obligations to the great people of Texas. Senate Bill 2 fulfills this significant duty of maintaining public schools by strengthening its support for classroom teachers who mold the young minds of the children of Texas.

**SB 2**  
**HISTORIC NEW FUNDS FOR TEXAS EDUCATION**

- ✓ **SCHOOL SAFETY**  
 \$400,000,000 INCREASED SCHOOL SAFETY FUNDING (DOUBLING THE PER STUDENT AND PER-CAMPUS FUNDS PASSED IN HB 3 (88R))
- ✓ **BASIC ALLOTMENT**  
 \$975,000,000 INVESTMENT IN BASIC ALLOTMENT INCREASES
- ✓ **TEACHER PAY RAISE**  
 \$ 3.8 BILLION SPECIFICALLY FOR ACROSS THE BOARD RAISES FOR TEXAS TEACHERS
  - \$3,000 ACROSS THE BOARD PAY RAISES
  - \$7,000 RAISE FOR TEACHERS IN SMALL-MIDSIZE DISTRICTS (SMALL - MIDSIZE DISTRICTS HAVE ENROLLMENT UNDER 5,000 STUDENTS, AND MAKE UP 82% OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS THROUGHOUT THE STATE)
  - \$317,500,000 TEACHER INCENTIVE ALLOTMENT ACCELERATION AND GRANTS

School safety funding is bolstered in this bill as it doubles the amount school districts will receive per student from \$10 to \$20, and per campus from \$15,000 to \$30,000. While there will never be an appropriate price tag to place upon the safety of Texas children, increasing the funding is a step forward in safeguarding schools throughout Texas.

## Border Security

Texas is experiencing a record number of immigrants crossing the border daily, and the Biden Administration has left Texas to address the crisis at the Border. Senate Bill 4 is a response to this crisis; it will provide necessary increases in minimum sentencing for the offense of human smuggling, for operating a stash house, or for evading arrest or detention. A ten-year minimum sentence in this bill makes the offense of human smuggling a felony of the third degree. Human smuggling violations include an individual smuggling a family member of the third degree of affinity or consanguinity. The penalty is increased from a two-year minimum to a five-year minimum. The operation of a stash house will be a five-year minimum sentence and is considered a felony of the third degree. The offense can be increased to a felony of the second degree if it is committed in combination with crimes such as smuggling of persons, trafficking of persons, sexual assault, or bodily injury.

Senate Bill 11 is Texas' answer to the federal government's lack of enforcement of border crossing. Currently, our law enforcement officers are powerless to detain and arrest individuals who are caught entering the state through illegal ports of entry. In an attempt to address this, Senate Bill 11 creates a new offense of Improper Entry from Foreign Nations. This offense would be a Class A misdemeanor if found guilty in court, with the potential to become a state jail felony if the individual is a repeat offender.

While this legislation is necessary to support our law enforcement and the efforts to reduce crossings at illegal ports of entry, costs are associated.

According to testimony heard in the Senate Committee on Border Security, only 3,000 Operation Lone Star beds can be utilized for this offense. The bill requires an individual who is arrested on this charge to be detained in a facility established by Operation Lone Star.

However, if those beds run out of space, it could fall on our county jails to fill the gap, which means higher costs. Some counties claimed they would need to increase property tax rates to meet the need for this particular offense.

### **COVID-19 and Medical Freedom**

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, I have been a vocal leader regarding the need to protect the rights of Texans when it comes to healthcare. Senate Bill 7 prohibits employers from adopting or enforcing a mandate that requires an employee, contractor, or applicant to be vaccinated against COVID-19 as a condition of employment. Also, it prohibits adverse actions by employers against employees or applicants for refusal to be vaccinated against COVID-19.

There are no exemptions in Senate Bill 7, the prohibition laid out above would apply to all working Texans. Employees could file complaints with the Texas Workforce Commission and employers found in violation of this law would be fined not more than \$10,000 per violation, unless they proceed with a job offer or reinstate a terminated employee. The bill also grants the attorney general an option to file for injunctive relief to prevent continued violations.

Although, Senate Bill 7 does not include ALL vaccinations as I would rather have seen, this gets us a step in the right direction, closer to medical freedom.

A prohibition on vaccine mandates is needed to curb the government intrusion into the personal, medical decision-making of individuals. While this bill does not include all vaccines, it serves a role in stopping COVID-19 vaccine mandates. No one should have to choose between making a living and taking a vaccine, especially an ineffective, high-risk vaccine. There will be efforts to add an exemption for healthcare workers, however, individual rights are paramount, and we cannot carve out any group of individuals whose rights do not matter.

### **Other items on the call still to be addressed**

As the Senate continues to work into this Third Called Special Legislative Session, we still have legislation concerning the public safety, security, environmental quality, and property ownership in areas like the Colony Ridge development. In Liberty County, just north of Houston, an expansion of a massive residential development is being developed. Local residents have a growing concern over safety, negative and adverse effects locally, as these reportedly new 75,000 residents have had on the system.

See more in a letter addressed to Governor Greg Abbott from some of the Texas Congressional Delegation [here](#):



## Some Must Haves - Grid Security and Election Integrity

A Special Legislative Session can be granted for up to 30 days. Given we are only a week into the current 30 day Special Session, there is still plenty of time to add some much necessary priorities for Texans.

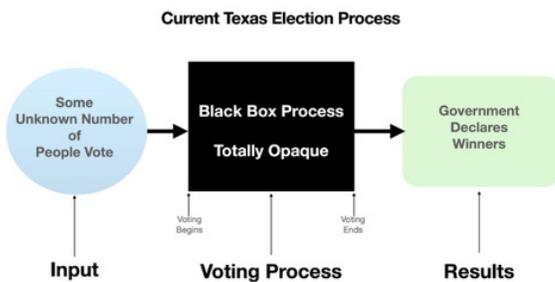
### Grid Security

If we look at current events, Israel's electric grid is under the worst kind of attack. Although Israel took measures to harden infrastructure and limit vulnerabilities, it is yet to be seen if these measures were sufficient to withstand the onslaught seen in recent days. While it is a world away, the threat of physical and cyber attacks to the Texas electric grid is also a very real possibility. Although both types of attacks have been on the rise in recent years, state and federal agencies have done little to address these threats in a meaningful way.

One could say the industry and your government is continuing to play Russian roulette with the grid while cashing in on taxpayers' hard-earned money. The decisions made with regards to hardening standards are not in the best interest of the people, it makes you question who is behind the scenes pulling the strings. We must have the opportunity to address this. It is not a matter of if, but a matter of when.

### Election Integrity

The lack of accuracy, transparency, and accountability in the current Texas election process means it would be impossible to present sufficient evidence in a court of law to prove that anyone elected to public office was actually the intent of the majority of those who voted in their election.



The current Texas election process is a true “BLACK-BOX” operation. Why? Because there is no TRANSPARENCY, no ACCOUNTABILITY, and the ACCURACY is unknowable. There are only three things we know for sure at the conclusion of a Texas election:

1. Some unknown number of people cast votes,
2. The voting period began and ended; and
3. Winners were declared by a governing body.

Texas elections are too complicated. There is no transparency, almost no accountability, and the true accuracy of the published results is unknowable. Texans deserve to have an election process that is easy, inexpensive, and secure.

Handful of points could help move Texas in the right direction.

- Handmarked Paper Ballots
- Precinct Voting Only
- Mandatory Zero/Results Tape
- Single In-Person Voting Period
- Paper Poll Books
- Precinct to County Verification

We must not let this special legislative session opportunity pass us by.

**Gain additional information you may have missed on important issues to Texans.**

*Topics include COVID, Grid Security, Election Integrity, and other important major issues.*

Find them by scanning this QR code

**Senator Bob Hall**

Senate District 2

[www.SenatorBobHall.com](http://www.SenatorBobHall.com)

