

November 2021

Legislative Report

Elections

The filing period for 2022 elections began on November 13th and will end on December 13th. The biggest news so far in that regard is the filing of Beto O'Rourke for Governor, who will have an uphill battle with Gov. Abbott, who should have no problem beating his two primary opponents. One of our own State Representatives, Ryan Guillen, created quite a splash last week, as well, when he was joined by Gov. Abbott in Floresville in announcing his switch to the Republican Party. His switch was not a surprise to Capitol insiders, though, because his new district is almost 60-40 percent Republican.

Not exactly in our district, but nearby, there has been a lot of activity related to the retirements of Eddie Lucio, Jr. from the Senate and Eddie Lucio III from the House. Both districts are heavily weighted in Cameron County. So far, in the Senate race, an AOC-style woman and the attorney-daughter of Steve LaMantia have announced their intentions to run in the Democratic Primary. Even though the Kleberg County Judge had been mentioned as a possible candidate, their likely Republican opponent appears to be former RGV Chamber of Commerce Executive Director and current Texas Workforce Commissioner, Julián Alvarez.

Now that retirements and filings are rapidly occurring, so have candidate fundraising activities. Fundraising is as intense as usual for these cycles because it is likely the primaries will be held at their regularly scheduled time of March 1st unless some unexpected delay occurs because of numerous legal challenges to the redistricting plans. The new House District map can be found on page 38 of this link:

https://data.capitol.texas.gov/dataset/71af633c-21bf-42cf-ad48-4fe95593a897/resource/e8a63cb9-001b-4b1f-a7f8-9106cce80706/download/planh2316_map_report_package.pdf

Also, possibly of interest to our board and staff, Jennifer Storm, originally from Premont, invited me to attend an event in Waco sponsored by a state-wide organization she heads. The purpose of the event was to honor 23 outstanding legislators, giving me a chance to visit with two freshmen State Rep. veterinarians who both would like to be appointed to the Natural Resources Committee. I advised both of them on water issues during their first campaigns and both would be excellent members of that committee.

I have continued talking with Louie, Andy, and some other GCD general managers about the possibility of using some American Rescue Act funds through the counties to augment our well plugging program. As yet, I have been unable to find any other county where that is being done. I had a phone conference with Amber Blount, the new TAGD board chair, this month and she thinks it is a good idea to pursue. She said she would put the question out among the members. In the meantime, Louie, Andy and I will continue talking about ideas to take the lead on this issue, which Amber encouraged. I will also be researching the new federal infrastructure act to see if some of those funds might be available through the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB), which will undoubtedly be a state pass-through agency.

Interim Charges

At the TAGD summit in early September, House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Tracy King asked that we give him ideas for studies by his committee during the interim. The interim charges are announced by the Speaker and Lt. Governor, but their charges usually closely adhere to their chairmen's recommendations. According to Matt Lamon in Rep. Lozano's office, the Speaker asked for committee chair recommendations by November the 22nd. Therefore, I went ahead and forwarded the following recommendations to Sam Bacarisse, director of the House Natural Resources Committee:

- Consider state funding support for GCD well plugging programs
- More detailed research by the TWDB of subsidence and intermingling of potable and brackish water potentially caused by the production of brackish water in the lower Coastal Bend area.
- A detailed TWDB study of any recharge of brackish aquifers in the lower Coastal Bend area.
- A detailed TWDB study of the feasibility of aquifer storage and recovery projects in the lower Coastal Bend area.
- A detailed TWDB cost/benefit study of increasing cloud seeding activities in the lower Coastal Bend area.
- A comprehensive state-wide TWDB study of water availability and projected demands for the future.
- Consider allowing special district boards to meet remotely.

