

TEXAS EAGLE FORUM

May 2023

Dear Texas Eagles,

Texas Eagle Forum is blessed to have many grassroots supporters. Most of you have been involved with TEF for a long time and have a special appreciation for everything this organization is doing to protect our great state from the ruinous impact of leftist policies and ideology. And it is no exaggeration to say that the 88th Legislative Session, which just wrapped up, provided us ample opportunity to do just that.

Texas Eagles remain dedicated to protecting families, religious freedom, biblical values, and a free society for all. And though we could not stop every bad bill, nor could we ensure every good bill passed through, we will never stop the work of bringing truth and light to our government.

While we all strive to make Texas a better place, especially for our children, it is a great encouragement to us to remember and to know that it is God who will win in the end. *He* has the final word – not the governor, not the president - no, the Lord God Almighty, Who was, and is, and is to come! *He* will speak the last words over us, and there will be no end to His peaceful kingdom. *Alleluia!*

In this Session Issue of *The Torch*, Texas Eagle Forum President Cindi Castilla discusses notable legislation from the 88th Session through the lens of TEF's legislative priorities, which we published in January before Session opened. From her inside perspective, having spent weeks in Austin volunteering tirelessly to meet with lawmakers and their staff, Cindi offers us just a glimpse of the enormous effort that goes into navigating Austin politics on behalf of Texas families and children.

So I hope you will celebrate with me the incredible effort and achievement of volunteer Eagles who served generously and selflessly in Austin over the last five months. Let's take a moment to offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for awakening good people to the critical times in which we live and for providing abundantly for Texas Eagle Forum to be able to continue good works in His name this Session.

As more friends and families awaken to the truth, we hope you will be ready to share with them the ways in which they can join the vital efforts of grassroots conservatism through organizations such as Texas Eagle Forum. With the 2024 election season right around the corner, the need for volunteers is greater than ever. There is no prerequisite for participation other than our shared faith and values. Texas Eagle Forum has a place for everyone, who is willing, to serve, learn, and grow. We look forward to the future with your support!

Faithfully,

Jennifer Vermeulen
Editor
Texas Eagle Forum

THE TORCH

TEXAS EAGLE FORUM

Session Issue

88th Legislative Session Review

By Cindi Castilla, TEF President

In January of this year, Texas Eagle Forum published its biennial list of legislative priorities for the 88th Legislative Session, spanning a broad range of topics essential to preserving our freedom, protecting families, and securing a strong future for Texas. Before Session had even opened, Senators and Representatives had already pre-filed over 1500 bills. Thousands more were filed before the March 10th deadline. As our Legislators gathered on January 10th for 140 days of lawmaking, Texas Eagle Forum was there, ready for the work of sheparing good bills and helping stop bad bills on behalf of all Texans.

By early January, I had already started traveling to Austin to meet with legislators from across the state. I was blessed to have several Eagles help with setting appointments to keep our days filled until hearings started. When our issue chairs were available, they came along and presented on their specific topics. We shared research and testimony addressing our TEF Legislative Priorities: Election Transparency, Education and Parental Rights, Child Protection, Gambling and Marijuana (we are against any expansion), our Border, States Rights, and Medical Freedom, among other issues.

From the start, we had our Eagle eyes on bills across many areas of law that impact the family. From Election integrity and Education, to Parental Rights and living free from Government Overreach, we sifted through thousands of bills to identify those most critical to taking our state back from the progressive Left. We also kept our eyes on our elected officials, particularly those who claim to be conservative but need encouragement and support in order to exercise their principles, preserve their integrity, and hold the line against bills that move us further left instead of helping return us to the right.

We certainly faced an uphill battle. This session exposed those who deserve to serve and those who will need to be replaced. In December, the majority party in the Texas House disappointed us by choosing a speaker candidate, who has not been supportive of conservative issues, during their private caucus meeting. They voted on paper so their ballot was secret, yet only 6 voted against last session's speaker. We were shocked. It is clear that most who call themselves Conservative are not willing to fight for values that match the idea.

But thankfully we have a few wonderfully strong members of our Texas House and Senate. With their help, this is where we stand on our original priorities at the close of the 88th Legislature.

Let's take a look at where we are on bills that impact our families and Texas.

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Stop the Practice of ‘Transgender Medicine’ in Texas.

Notable bills: SB 14 (Campbell), SB, HB 1686 (Oliverson) (companion bill), and SB 249 (Hall, similar).

TEF began to fight for this protection in 2019. When we started sharing potential bill language to protect our children from harm with legislators, many could not believe this was even a real issue. Fast forward to this session, we just witnessed over 8,300 Texans post comments on SB 14, the bill banning transgender medical procedures for children. Over 79% supported the bill! We are excited to report that this has finally passed and is waiting for the Governor’s signature. Texas will finally protect children from bodily mutilation and sterilization when they are far too young to understand the life-long consequences these procedures will cause. Praise God!

On a personal note, this was more than a legislative battle. Over and over again we were struck with genuine sadness by what we witnessed in the Capitol when ‘trans’ issues were being heard. The truth is that the “trans” side is mostly young people who are struggling with mental health issues. Many have been bullied, rejected, abused, or hurt. We know this because we hear them testify about their lives at every hearing. They wrongly believe that mutilating their bodies is the solution to their pain. Many become very emotional and angry. Those on our side remained calm, and most simply spoke truth when they testified. But we do need to pray for those who believe they are transgender. I hope that believers will pray for those who are caught up in the transgender lifestyle so that they will understand that God wants to help them through their struggles and is waiting for them to turn to Him.

Enshrine Fundamental Parental Rights in the Texas Constitution

Texas has not codified parental rights. We know God has given us these in our free nation, but we seem to need laws to make those in power honor those rights. In a few cases, legislators included parental rights language in education bills as a lure, but then the rest of the bill had serious issues. The fight must continue.

Promote Medical Freedom from Government Mandates.

Most bills filed in this area focused specifically on COVID-19. We wanted bills which would ensure Texans would have the final say in their personal medical decisions. HB 44 (Swanson) doesn’t allow Medicaid providers to discriminate based on vaccine status. This is great, but everyone should be guaranteed this protection.

Promote Election Integrity.

Despite extraordinary efforts by TEF Election Integrity Chair Beth Biesel and many great bills filed, it appears in the end, we will have achieved no real progress to return to transparent elections. As we go to press, we’ve just seen SB 1070 pass the house. This important bill will force Texas to replace the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC) voting system with a much improved and less expensive voter database system, as well as clean up our voter rolls. Beth will spend the summer traveling with a team of experts to present the Hand Count RoadShow to county leaders. You can see if she will be in your county at HandCountRoadShow.org

End ‘Woke’ Education in Texas Public Schools.

Notable bills: HB 1804, HB 900.

HB 1804 (Leo-Wilson) was an excellent bill, but it got a fairly late hearing. We hope this bill will return next session. It would put the State Board of Education (SBOE) in charge of curriculum again (which it lost in 2011). SBOE makes publishers meet our standards and leaves out non-educational materials.

HB 900 (Patterson, senate sponsor-Paxton) passed the House and Senate, and we expect it to become law. It will make book vendors responsible for marketing sexually inappropriate materials for children and delivering them to our school libraries. If they do send sexually explicit materials to our schools, our schools will be barred from ordering any books from the guilty entity. We love this bill!

SB 595 (Kolkhorst, companion HB1149 Swanson) would have protected students from taking assessments without express parental permission. It is hard to shock us, but the surveys children have reported taking at school have left us speechless. Sadly, this parental rights and child protection bill died in the house.

Work to oppose any expansion of marijuana or gambling.

Marijuana - Notable Bills: HB 1805, HB 218

This priority was met with a lot of disappointment. The Texas House passed at least two marijuana bills expanding its use while reducing penalties for possession. HB 1805 (Klick) significantly expanded medical marijuana, while HB 218 (Moody) reduced marijuana possession of under 2 oz. to a simple citation. It also provides a \$30 fee to have this citation expunged after 180 days. It creates no barriers to continued usage and no motivation to help a person get on a better track.

Research clearly shows that marijuana use is related to mental illness. It is the drug most related to future fentanyl addiction. It can make people suicidal and paranoid and is a factor (hidden by media) in almost all mass shootings. Many states regret increasing their users. So why are our politicians voting for this?

Online sports betting and casino gambling – Notable Bills: Sports Betting - HJR 102(Leach) and Casino Betting - HB 1942 (Leach) and HJR 155 (Geren) and HB 2843 (Kuempel)

The two online sports betting bills both passed in the house. Sports betting is known to be highly addictive, especially for our young people. This industry preys on our citizens with aggressive marketing campaigns offering new gamblers bonus money. In reality these same companies will cut-off or limit anyone who can regularly beat the odds. The businesses exist only to make money, and they will take a person's last dollar for nothing more than chance.

The two casino gambling bills did not clear the House. Both authors postponed votes hoping to pressure or trade for more votes, and neither proposed a third and final vote. Gambling is predatory and targets the poor. It costs society more than it brings in. It is a wealth-transfer to casinos, and they do not pick up the costs of the damage addiction leaves behind the addicted.

Our House showed severe weakness in the areas of addiction. They grandstanded bills that dealt with taxpayer funded 'solutions' to help addicted people, while many simultaneously voted to create more addiction!

We are grateful to Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and our Texas Senators for not taking up any of the gambling or marijuana bills.

Secure the Texas Electrical Grid.

Notable bill: SB 330 (Hall)

Senator Hall has worked tirelessly to protect our electrical grid from natural or antagonist EMP's that would destroy it in a flash. His bill, SB 330, would have prepared our Texas electrical grid to withstand and recover from natural and terrorist threats. It was reduced to a study, which would advise implementation, before it passed 30-0 in the Senate. Once again, Sen. Hall's bill should have sped through both chambers early enough to become law. Instead it crawled along all stages and died on the House General Calendar.

We are beyond frustrated that our elected officials have

not deferred to Sen. Hall's vast knowledge on this subject and fixed our grid. It doesn't make sense unless they are pandering to short-sighted utilities over protecting Texans. There were other bills filed that relate to the grid, but none addressed the biggest threat to you and your loved ones.

Texas must ignore unconstitutional federal laws and mandates.

SB 313 (Hall) and HB 384 (C. Bell) were great bills to allow our legislators to deem federal laws and mandates unconstitutional and ask our AG to support our constitutional right to ignore them. Neither bill even received a hearing. We find this disconcerting. States must defend their rights under the 10th Amendment. Interestingly the 'school choice' bill which got closest to passing included substitute language to allow the federal government into our educational assessments. This is a hard no for TEF. We are frustrated when any bill filed by a "conservative" defers or gives outright power to the federal government. This should never happen in the Lone Star State!

Concluding Thoughts on the 88th Session.

As we wrap up the 88th session, I want to thank you for all you have done to further great bills and kill a few terrible bills. Some really great policies would not have been implemented without engaged citizens speaking out. The work is exhausting, but when we win, the rewards are beyond measure.

By standing on God's Word, the Constitution, and strong families, Texas Eagle Forum will continue to call on every legislator to serve their constituents faithfully, diligently, and fearlessly. And while we're on the topic of legislators: Keep your eye out for the TEF Scorecard Issue of The Torch coming out this summer. You won't want to miss this as we head into the 2024 election season.

Thank you for being in the fight with us! Texas Eagle Forum is blessed to have many grassroots supporters. Your calls and emails to your elected officials make an impact. Your financial gifts to TEF help us gather information, help teach others how to fight for our principles, and to take action in Austin when necessary. Thank you for being an Eagle in the great state of Texas!



Cindi Castilla
President of Texas Eagle Forum



Gov. Gret Abbott Calls Special Session

Gov. Greg Abbott called an immediate special session Monday night, just hours after lawmakers completed the year’s regular legislative session without passing numerous key bills state leaders had identified as priorities. Abbott said in a statement the special session officially began at 9 p.m. Monday and will be focused on property tax relief and border security. “Many critical items remain that must be passed,” Abbott said, which he asserts will require multiple special sessions. The agenda for the first special session will focus on slashing property tax rates “solely by reducing the school district maximum compressed tax rate in order to provide lasting property-tax relief,” Abbott said in his statement. SOURCE: Alejandro Serrano, Texas Tribune, May 29, 2023.

AG Ken Paxton Impeachment Trial Set for August

The Texas Senate agreed Monday to start its trial of impeached Attorney General Ken Paxton no later than Aug. 28, shortly after the House named 12 members to prosecute the case. Paxton has blasted the impeachment as a “politically motivated sham” and expressed hope the Senate will swiftly clear his name. A two-thirds vote is required in the Senate to remove Paxton from office. The Senate appointed a seven-member committee that will prepare recommendations on the rules of procedure for the trial and then present them to the full Senate on June 20. And then Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick can pick a date “not later than” Aug. 28 on which the chamber will convene as a court of impeachment. SOURCE: Patrick Svitek, Texas Tribune, May 29, 2023.

Texas Speaker Dade Phelan Accused of Being Drunk on House Floor

Attorney General Ken Paxton is calling on Texas House Speaker Dade Phelan to resign, saying the Republican from Beaumont was “in an obviously intoxicated state” while presiding over the House. Phelan’s office fired back, saying a committee is investigating Paxton’s office, and they said his comments were an attempt to “save face.” Paxton’s office issued a statement: “After much consideration, it is with profound disappointment that I call on Speaker Dade Phelan to resign at the end of this legislative session. Texans were dismayed to witness his performance presiding over the Texas House in a state of apparent debilitating intoxication. His conduct has negatively impacted the legislative process and constitutes a failure to live up to his duty to the public,” SOURCE: FOX4 Staff, FOX4 KDFW (online), May 23, 2023.

Texas House Gives Final Approval to SB-14

Gov. Greg Abbott said he will sign Senate Bill 14 into law, which will make Texas one of over a dozen states that restrict transition-related care for transgender minors. “I’m not going to make any secret about it. I’ll be signing it,” he said. “This is about protecting children.” Authored by New Braunfels Republican Sen. Donna Campbell, SB 14 would prohibit children under the age of 18 from accessing transition-related medical treatments including puberty blockers, hormone therapies and surgeries. The Senate voted 19-12 on Wednesday to accept the House’s version of the bill and send it to Abbott’s desk. On Thursday, legal groups opposing the legislation — including the American Civil Liberties Union, the ACLU of Texas, Lambda Legal and the Transgender Law Center — also said they will launch a legal challenge to try to block it from taking effect. SOURCE: Alex Nguyen, Texas Tribune, May 18, 2023.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“America’s present need is not heroics but healing; not nostrums but normalcy; not revolution but restoration.”
~ Warren G. Harding

GREAT AMERICAN QUOTE

“Good citizenship and defending democracy means living up to the ideals and values that make this country great.”

- Ronald Reagan

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