

Texas Legislature Primer – Working the System

The 84th Texas Legislature is in full swing, and we have the same Speaker of the House, and our new Lt. Governor seems to be backtracking on championing open carry legislation. It would be easy to throw up our hands and say, "There's nothing we can do to get conservative legislation passed."

However, we are NOT victims of circumstances. We are the voices of "We The People", and we have a lot of work to do.

We can't point a finger at Joe Straus, any Chairman, any Representative, et. al, as being the problem if we are not working the system tenaciously. So what is "The System"? I've spent a lot of time trying to find a primer, and there didn't seem to be one that gave the "back room" story, so I sought out information from past representatives and am submitting it to The People of Texas to use.

My hope is that these steps be shared with other activists in pursuit of liberty. [Texas Legislature Online](#) has a document giving basic information on the progress of a bill. In 2011, Clear Lake TEA Party documented their [Watchdog](#) program, and their "how to" is excellent. I've provided links to both of those above.



An important recommendation from my contacts, **We must work simultaneously in the House and Senate!**

The System

1. **Bills are introduced in the House and Senate.** (If you don't find a filed bill on a particular subject already filed, contact your legislator or a "friendly" legislator and ask them to file one - be specific!)
 - A. Each bill has a Primary Author
 - B. Each bill can have up to four (4) Joint Authors. It is recommended that if the primary author of the bill doesn't, activists should work to drum up support from different factions of the Legislative Body - and ask the Chairman of the Committee who will hear the bill to be a joint author, or another member of the committee. Note: If it is deemed to be an important bill to either pass or stop (in the House), it will be sent to the State Affairs Committee.
 - i. [84th Legislature House Committee Assignments](#)
 - ii. [84th Legislature Senate Committee Assignments](#)
 - iii. If you are uncertain who these representatives and senators are, look them up here. (Thank you Kelly Canon for sharing your work!)
 - a. [House](#)
 - b. [Senate](#)
 - C. A bill can have as many co-authors as want to sponsor the bill. The more co-authors a bill has, the better chance it has of getting out of committee.
 - D. To introduce a bill in the House of Representatives, a state representative first must file the bill with the Chief Clerk of the House. The house rules of procedure permit unrestricted introduction of bills during the first 60 calendar days of each regular session. **After the 60-day deadline, the introduction of any bill in the house, other than a local bill, emergency**

appropriates, or emergency matters submitted by the governor, requires the consent of at least four-fifths of those members present and voting.

- E. To introduce a bill in the Senate, a senator first must file the required number of copies of the bill with the Secretary of the Senate, who sequentially numbers each bill in the order in which it is received. The senate rules of procedure also permit unrestricted introduction of bills during the first 60 calendar days of each regular session. **After the 60-day deadline, the introduction of any bill in the senate, other than a local bill, emergency appropriations, or emergency matters specifically submitted by the governor, requires the consent of at least four-fifths of the membership of the senate.**
- F. **NOTE: The first day of the session began January 13, 2015. The 60-day deadline ends on March 13, 2015.**
2. **Bills are sent to the appropriate committee.** When a bill is introduced or is received from the opposite chamber for consideration, it is read for the first time by its caption only and is referred by the Speaker or Lt. Governor to an appropriate committee.
- A. In the house rules, each committee is assigned jurisdiction over a specific subject matter, and the speaker refers legislation to house committees based on those subject matter jurisdictions.
- B. The senate rules do not specify subject matter jurisdictions for senate committees. The lieutenant governor may refer legislation in the senate to any standing committee or subcommittee, although unofficial subject matter jurisdictions are usually followed.
- C. **Although virtually all bills are referred to a committee, a large number of bills are never reported out of committee. Within the committee, bills may be sent to subcommittees.**
- i. **Unless the authors of the bills request a hearing, further action may not occur. Do NOT listen to representatives and senators tell you about bills they filed without asking the following questions. That may be the story they want you to hear. Be informed and don't fall for one of the oldest tricks in the Texas Legislature!**
- a. **Did you request a hearing on the bill?**
- b. **Did you attempt to elicit support by members of the committee/subcommittee reading the bill? Whose support did you seek on the legislation? What testimony did you provide as to why the bill should be moved to the floor for a vote? Can you provide any documentation?**
- D. Activists should call and email their representative and senator at least weekly. Asking them to author, joint author or co-author bills you are interested in getting through and becoming law. Once a bill is referred to a committee, we need to begin to work on the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and committee members. **Although in their capacity as committee members, the members SHOULD listen to all Texans, but they won't. I have been assured by these former representatives that these members will only listen to their constituents - the ones who can re-elect or replace them.**
- i. **This is where networking with activists from across the state becomes important. Find a liberty group in that chairman's or committee member's district to call them and to put out word to others in their district. Not just once - the representatives and senators do take into account the number of calls they receive from their district. The most noise that can be elicited from their district, the better.**
- ii. [Texas House Districts](#)
- iii. [Texas Senate Districts](#)
- iv. [Who Represents Me?](#)
- a. **Find groups on Facebook, Twitter and other forms of social media to get out the word!** It's unfortunate that these members won't listen to all Texans, so it's important we get out the word to conservatives in their districts.
- a. **Coming soon will be a website where patriots can register so that we can pass on information for those phone calls and emails to those chairmen and committee members. (This information will ONLY be used for this explicit purpose.)** Now that we know their rules, we'll combine our efforts across the state. We WILL be heard!
- b. **A word about rallies and protests** - These are excellent places to meet like-minded activists from across the state, and if we get enough numbers in the crowd, to get media attention. However, I've been told by several representatives and senators that the events do not influence their vote. While they do make a mental note of the

event, **hearing from their constituents regularly and in a large numbers influence them the most!** Let them hear from you - it's your civic responsibility!

- E. We want to work to get a hearing in the committee. Use the [Watchdog](#) link for a "how to" on creating your TLC account and receiving bill and committee notifications. Put the word out about committee hearings as soon as you find out about them. Go [testify](#) in person or by letter (if allowed).
 - i. If the bill gets a hearing, keep in mind that it isn't a slam dunk for the bill getting out of committee. Even AFTER the hearing - **the constituents in those members' districts have the loudest voice - and the loudest voice of all are constituents in the Chairman's district.** We will need LOTS of calls. Be a squeaky wheel! If you aren't in their district, be a squeaky wheel to those who are!
 - ii. If the bill gets out of committee, it will be referred to the Calendars Committee **and all the steps above need to be followed for the Calendar Committee members and chairman.**
 - iii. If the bill makes it out of Calendars, keep up the chatter until the vote takes place. Does it seem to be bottle-necking in one committee or another? Get the word out to the troops that we need patriots to battle!
- F. Whether or not YOUR representative or senator are in a particular committee or not, be sure to communicate regularly with them as well. If Texans from across the state are calling and calling their representatives on some particular topics, you can bet as a group of legislators they will let the committee members know what Texans want!

3. **Floor Action**

- A. The first floor consideration of a bill occurs on its second reading. After it is read the second time (again by caption only) the measure is subject to debate and amendment by the entire membership of the chamber. On second reading, a bill may be amended by a simple majority of those members present and voting. A vote is taken on each amendment that is presented. If no amendment is made or if those proposed are disposed of, a vote is taken on the bill as amended, if applicable. For the originating chamber, that vote is a vote to engrossment.
- B. In the opposite chamber, that vote is a vote to third reading. The bill in either chamber is then laid before the body for a third reading and final passage. A bill may be amended again on third reading, but amendments at this stage require a two-thirds majority of the members present for adoption.
- C. Although the Texas Constitution requires a bill to be read on three separate legislative days in each chamber before it can have the force of law, this constitutional rule may be suspended by a four-fifths vote of the members present from the chamber in which the bill is pending.

4. **Governor's Action**

- A. Except in the case of a bill sent to the governor within 10 days of final adjournment, on receiving the bill, the governor has 10 days in which to sign the bill, veto it, or allow it to become law without a signature.
- B. If the governor elects to veto the bill and the legislature is still in session, the bill is returned to the chamber in which it originated with an explanation of the governor's objections. A two-thirds majority in each chamber is required to override the veto. If the governor neither vetoes nor signs the bill within the allotted time, the bill becomes law.
- C. If a bill is sent to the governor within 10 days of final adjournment, the governor has until 20 days after final adjournment to sign the bill, veto it, or allow it to become law without a signature.