



# Texas Legislative Toolkit

# A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO THE TEXAS LEGISLATURE

## WHO MAKES UP THE STATE LEGISLATIVE BODY?

Just like the U.S. Congress, Texas has a House and a Senate. The House is made up of 150 elected Texas State Representatives. Their title are frequently abbreviated to "Rep." Each Rep. serves a two-year term. The House is led by the Speaker, who is a regularly elected State Rep., they are nominated as Speaker by the 149 other members of the House. The Speaker picks who sits on what committee, determines which bills are heard in a given committee and plays a role in what bills make it to the "House floor" for a vote. More on that later!

The Senate has 31 members, each serving a four-year term.

The Senate is currently led by Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick, who (unlike the Speaker of the House) was elected statewide to the position, like the Governor of Texas. His title is frequently abbreviated as Lt. Gov. He has powers similar to that of House Speaker: He appoints committees, controls the flow of bills in and out of those committees, and can decide what bills come up for a vote on the Senate floor. If any of that's confusing, don't worry, we'll cover it soon!

## WHAT ROLE DOES THE GOVERNOR PLAY?

The Governor has the power of the bully pulpit: He can *propose* laws and even a state budget, but he can't write bills. Arguably, his most important power is the veto. If a bill passes, the Governor can strike it down with a veto.

## WHY DOES THE LEGISLATURE ONLY MEET FOR 140 DAYS EVERY OTHER YEAR?

In short, early Texan's love for small government and inability to travel quickly. About 140 years ago, people in the Southern U.S. were pretty suspicious of large governments and lacked the technology/resources to be away from their farm or ranch for more than 140 days. So, when people were settling on how often Texas lawmakers would meet, they decided it should be as infrequent as possible. The old joke is the framers wanted the Texas Legislature to meet two days every 140 years, but settled on 140 days every two years.

“

Good thing we've still got politics in Texas - finest form of free entertainment ever invented.

-Molly Ivins



## BILL STAGES

**Step 1:** After a bill is filed, the bill is read in the House or Senate, and the Speaker or Lt. Gov. moves it to the next step.

**Step 2:** The bill has a hearing in a committee and is passed (or it doesn't and it "dies").

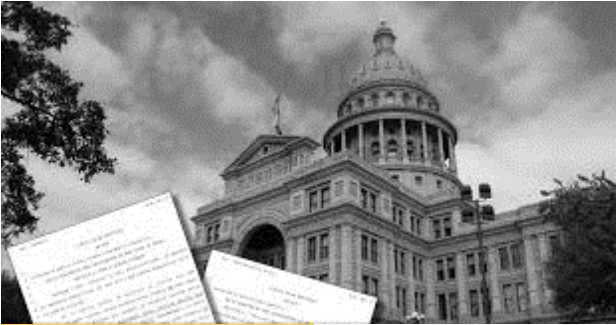
**Step 3:** The bill heads to the House Calendars Committee which sets the daily agenda for the House. Alternatively, Senators agree by 3/5's vote to send the bill to the Senate floor for debate. (Or they don't and the bill dies).

**Step 4:** The bill comes up for debate and vote on the "House/Senate floor." Where every Member can discuss the bill. If it passes, it must wait a day and then come up for a final vote. (If it fails during one of those two votes, the bill dies).

**Step 5:** The bill moves to the other chamber (House or Senate) to start the process anew. If it passes unchanged, it heads to the Governor's desk. (If it doesn't pass, the bill dies. If it is changed, the House and Senate have to come up with a compromise.)

**Step 6:** The Governor signs the bill into law or vetoes it and the bill dies. (The Texas Legislature has almost no ability to override a veto).





# Texas Policy Making Process

## IDEA

The process for creating a new law starts when a legislator first begins to formulate an idea. An idea for a new law may be suggested by anyone: concerned citizens, special interest groups, state agencies, or the Governor, for example. If you have an idea you would like to suggest to your legislator, you can use the [Who Represents Me](#) website to determine your Senator or Representative and to find his or her contact information and pitch your idea!

## INTRODUCTION

During a legislative session, members may introduce new legislation until filing deadlines identified on the [legislative dates calendar](#). When the Legislature is in session, the Texas Legislature Online (TLO) home page will include the time that the House and Senate are scheduled to convene each day. Methods to view introduced legislation include:

[Legislative Reports](#) - View a list of bills that have been filed in the House or Senate.

[Bill Status](#) - View the current status and legislative history for a bill.

[Text Search](#) - Find bills with specific content.

[Subject Search](#) - Find bills on a specific subject using the bill search or the subject index.

You can create a personal [bill list](#) and receive e-mail notification as the status changes on bills you chose to watch.

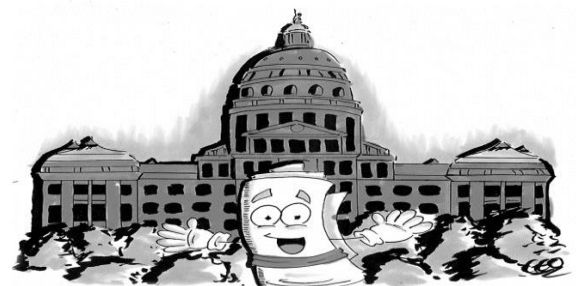
## REFERRAL TO HOUSE/SENATE COMMITTEE

Bills that have been referred to committee may be viewed using:

- [Legislative Reports](#)
- [Bill Search](#)

## CONSIDERED IN HOUSE/ SENATE COMMITTEE

When a bill is scheduled to be heard by a House or Senate committee, public notice is made to allow public participation in the committee process. View [House meeting notices](#) and [Senate meeting notices](#) to see which bills are scheduled to be considered at a particular committee meeting. Minutes are created by committee clerks after each public hearing. Use this website to view [House meeting minutes](#) and [Senate meeting minutes](#). Most committee meetings are available for viewing over the Internet on the [House](#) and [Senate](#) websites. You can receive notice of upcoming [House](#) and [Senate](#) committee meetings through e-mail.



## PLACED ON HOUSE/SENATE CALENDAR

After a bill has been reported favorably by a committee and the committee report has been printed, the bill is available for placement on a calendar. A calendar is a list of bills and resolutions that are scheduled to be considered by the full House or Senate. Use this website to view [House calendars](#) and [Senate calendars](#).

## Considered on House/Senate Floor

Journals are records of activity that occurs on the House or Senate floor and include actions that are taken on a bill and any amendments added to the bill. Use this website to view [House journals](#) and [Senate journals](#). View the [amendments](#) website to search for amendments based on chamber, author, bill, reading, and date. Proceedings on the House and Senate chamber floor may be viewed over the Internet at [House](#) and [Senate](#) websites.

## Signed/Vetoed by Governor

If a bill passes both the House and Senate, it may be signed or vetoed by the Governor or passed without signature. View the [legislative reports](#) to see a list of all bills passed or vetoed. Once legislation becomes law, it becomes codified as statute. Statutes may be viewed and searched at the [Texas Statutes](#) website.

## DATES OF INTREST

November 3, 2020: General election for federal, state, and county officers

November 9, 2020: Bill prefiling begins

January 12, 2021: 87th Legislature convenes at noon

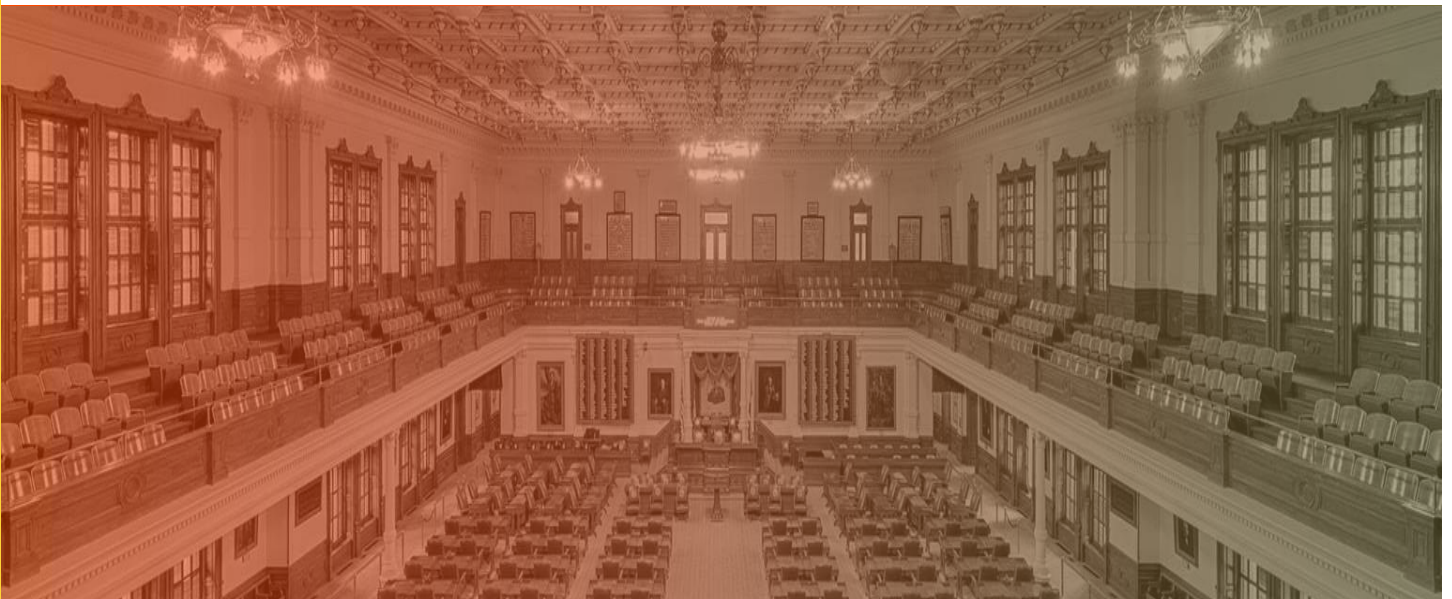
March 12, 2021: 60-day bill filing deadline

May 31, 2021: Adjournment sine die

June 20, 2021: Post-session 20-day deadline for Governor to sign or veto

August 30, 2021: Effective date

**FOR A FULL OVERVIEW  
OF THE LEGISLATIVE  
PROCESS IN TEXAS**  
[CLICK HERE](#)



# PEOPLE UNDER THE DOME



## Chief of Staff

The “Number-Two” in any office. The chief is responsible for how the office functions — they establish office policies and procedures. The chief oversees staffing decisions, manages employees and handles day-to-day responsibilities. The chief’s job varies from office to office, but they will always be second in command after the Member.

## Communications Director

Implements the Member’s communications strategy and manages the press team. The director handles television interviews, press releases, social media and print media. Some chiefs are heavily involved in communication, while others give the comms director more responsibility.

## Scheduler

Also called scheduling director, they are responsible for scheduling the Member’s engagements and work—directly with the chief. The director allows time for the communications and legislative teams to meet with the Member, organizes and books travel plans, and books appointments for the office. They review speaking invitations for the member or attend certain events on behalf of the Member.

## Legislative Director

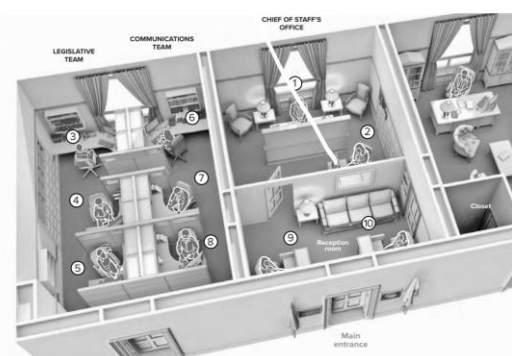
Manages the Member’s legislative portfolio and priorities and manages the legislative assistants. They work directly with the member to establish priorities and strategy. The legislative director is frequently in charge of vote recommendations, creating new legislation and running legislation through committee hearings.

## Legislative Aide

Researches legislation and issue areas. Often, they report to more senior staff members. They also often draft correspondence to constituents who write into the member.

## Case Worker

Manages constituent requests for assistance (casework) by working with administrative agencies. Serves as a liaison with state, federal and/or local agencies on behalf of constituents. Responds to casework inquiries from constituents. Acts as the grassroots Representative for the Member within assigned areas of responsibility.





# INSIGHT UNDER THE DOME

## Always

- Always be quick to respond to an email when arranging a time to meet or when someone is helping you with a job. When setting up an informational meeting, have clear goals in mind, like to discuss a specific opportunity or to learn more about the person's career path. Be prepared with questions.
- Always send a thank you email with your resume attached. A handwritten note is a nice touch, but a thank you email (with resume) is a must.
- Always email people with news of your new job before it's public. Be sure to email everyone you've met with for informational coffees/meetings or have helped you in any way in the jobs seeking process thanking them for the help and offering to help in the future. Keep in mind, they want you to succeed so letting them know in a personalized email and thanking them for the help will make them even more invested in your success down the road.



## Don't

- Don't be late for a networking coffee or informational meeting when someone is giving you some of their time to help. Don't make people work around your schedule when asking them to do an informational meeting/coffee/call. Try to be as accommodating as possible and when a time doesn't work for you be very apologetic and explain the reason you can't make it work.
- Don't assume that the person you are meeting with will have read your resume. Be prepared with your "elevator pitch" about who you are and how you got there.

# TEN TIPS ON TURNING AN INTERNSHIP INTO PERMANENT A POSITION

**Be on Time** (so be early)—Schedules can make this hard-- but try to plan as far ahead as you can in order to make sure you're on time or early as often as you can.

**Stay Late** (finish the work and don't leave it for the next day) – Sometimes you just can't stay late, but whenever you can, try to! Not only do you arrive early, you also stay late to get the job done and see how you can help your colleagues. Show the potential organization that you are committed and ready to tackle any challenge.

**Ask for Work** – After you complete your assigned tasks, ask for more work. Ask your colleagues or manager if they need any help on their projects. Create tasks that add value and revisit projects that can be improved. You'll make a lasting impression because of your contributions and you convey you are a team player.

**Produce an Excellent Product** – The quality of work you put forward again shows the type of work ethic you would bring to the organization. It also allows you to create a portfolio of work (writing samples, white papers, etc.) for other opportunities that may serve in securing a permanent position.

**Network** – Create meaningful relationships with staff and other interns. Go to happy hours, mixers, volunteer events as well use social media to grow your connections. These connections will help you and the Member you work for move bills and make positive change. Moreover, as you progress in your career, these connections will help your to grow, learn, gain new skills.

**Be Nice** –Are you a team player? Do you pitch in and help your colleagues? People naturally want to help someone who was nice or helpful to them, not the converse.

**Take Advantage of All Opportunities** – There may be numerous opportunities afforded to you during the internship and you should attempt to partake in them all. It may be mentorship, a tour, trainings or workshops – each and every offering is an opportunity to grow your skills, expand your network and lays the foundation for your career.

**Express Interest** – put feelers out there that you're interested in roles at the organization. While at the internship seek out informational interviews to learn more about the department, talk with staffers to understand what their respective role is and most importantly let people know you'd love to be part of the organization in the future.

**Do Your Job** – You are there to help the elected official and their constituents. There's a lot you can do at the Lege, but your job should always be your top priority. Don't forget that!





# Christine's List

## Christine's Job-Hunting Tips for the 87th Texas Legislative Session

Keep all communications with legislative offices SHORT, to the point. They are busy.

Lawmakers aren't likely to greet you on the phone or do the initial interview. That's the role of Chiefs of Staff/Office Managers. Remember that your first impression is made upon this senior staffer, who will have to work with you. Be receptive and uncomplicated.

Formal manners are expected, but don't trip over yourself repeating unnecessary nice-ities. Be yourself.

On your resume, provide at the top a summary of your best roles. It's helpful to state up front where you're coming from and what motivates you. Lawmakers usually seek passion as well as experience in their staff.

For example, you have no Lege experience but you're a decent writer and active in college political groups:

### *SUMMARY*

*Communicator, advocate, organizer, motivator. Experienced grassroots leader of volunteer-driven movements. Deliberate researcher and persuasive writer for policy and cause. Determined but friendly team player.*

### *OBJECTIVE*

*To apply my writing, research, advocacy and convictions toward policy development and persuasive communications in the service of progress.*

Member are best when they are folks known to the Capitol Crowd. If you can get a Member, advocate, nonprofit leader or senior staffer to recommend you, that really helps.

It's December, so reach out immediately to the Chief of Staff or Office Manager for all House and Senate members for whom you'd like to work, with a SHORT intro email, and attach your resume.

These are partisan jobs, so be careful not to apply to the office of your former employers' political rivals, unless you are burning bridges intentionally. Party absolutely matters at the Lege; it's rare for a staffer to "switch parties" between jobs.



# Job Boards

- [Christine's List](#)
- [Texas Politics Project](#)
- [Public Affairs Council](#)
- [Roll Call](#)
- [Texas Political Jobs](#)
- [Texas Blue Pages](#)
- [Texas Democratic Party](#)

[job openings](#)

- [Work In Texas](#)
- [Texas House of](#)

[Representatives jobs](#)

- [Texas State Senate jobs](#)
- [Texas Secretary of State](#)

[jobs](#)

