

Dear Friends,

Another week of the 87th legislative session is wrapping up... and this one has certainly been full and eventful. I hope you're well and appreciate you reading this week's update from Austin.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

We're past the halfway point in session and bills are beginning to move quickly through the legislative process. Just yesterday the House voted on and passed out the first five bills of the session. Additionally the House Committee on Judiciary and Civil Jurisprudence, which I chair, heard testimony on 20 bills and favorably voted out 14 bills to be heard and considered by the full House.

As a reminder, I want to make sure you are aware that the Capitol is open and you are more than welcome and encouraged to join us in-person if you wish to engage in the legislative process. There are also new and innovative ways for you to participate remotely, including registering your official position on any given piece of legislation through our public comment portal. You can find more information on how to do that [here](#).

Just yesterday, I officially laid out two additional pieces of legislation that I have authored, House Bill 1345 and House Joint Resolution 72.

[House Bill 1345](#), known as the Texas Disaster Volunteer Act, is meant to empower those who want to take time out of their work schedules to volunteer during times of disaster. Specifically, HB 1345 would allow State employees who volunteer with certain disaster relief organizations to take leave to volunteer in time of disaster without losing sick days, vacation days or pay. It is important to note that this volunteer leave is at the discretion of the employee's supervisor and can only be used for a maximum of 10 days in the fiscal year. The approved volunteer leave time for State employees' would hinge on a declaration of a state of emergency by the Governor. We passed this bill out of the Texas House last session – but it died in the Senate. I'm hopeful that this session we'll get it through both chambers and to the Governor's desk

[House Joint Resolution 72](#), known as the Texas Essential Church Act, is a proposed amendment to the Texas Constitution that would prohibit a church or place of worship

from being closed by any Government edict (Governor, County Judge, Mayor, etc.). The goal of HJR 72 is to protect our fundamental, God-given right to worship freely and ensure the strongest protections for our churches, our synagogues, our mosques and other places of worship and their congregations. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Governor Abbott declared a state of disaster and, in Texas, we did it right. But some government officials – here in Texas and elsewhere across the Nation – recklessly and callously infringed on the religious liberties of the citizens whom they swore an oath to protect. That, to me, is unacceptable, which is why I authored and filed this Constitutional Amendment. When it comes to our freedom of religion and the liberty to practice our sincerely held religious beliefs, a government official cannot and should not be able to trample on it, even in times of crisis. The Texas Senate has already passed this legislation on a largely bi-partisan basis, voting 28-2. I expect the Texas House to do the same in short order, which means that it will then be placed in front of the people of Texas in a statewide referendum this November.

BIG NEWS!

COVID-19 Vaccine Update: Beginning this Monday, March 29th, all adults - ages 16 and up - will be eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Please note that while most vaccines are authorized for people 18 and older, the Pfizer vaccine is the only one authorized for people 16 and up. Importantly, the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) has directed vaccine providers to prioritize those that are 80 years of age or older when scheduling appointments and accommodate anyone in that age group who presents for a vaccination, whether or not they have an appointment, by immediately moving them to the front of the line. In addition, DSHS will launch a website to allow people to register for a vaccine through some public health providers beginning next week. The public will be able to enroll in the Texas Public Health Vaccine Scheduler to identify upcoming vaccine clinics hosted by DSHS or a participating local health department and be notified when new clinics and appointments become available. People can continue to find additional providers through the [DSHS Vaccine Information page](#).

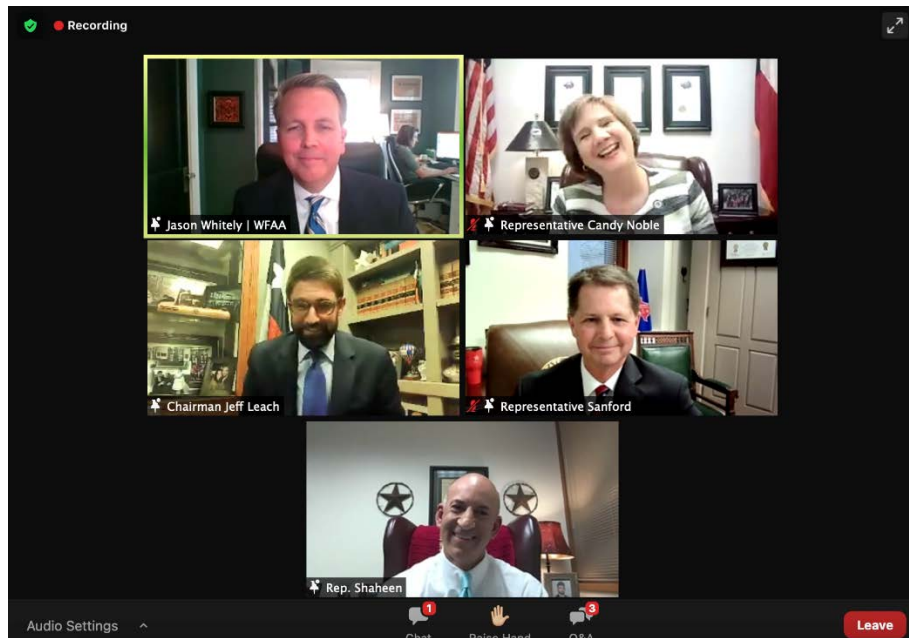
Likewise, Collin County has many locations set up and ready to administer the COVID-19 vaccine. To find the one nearest you and request an appointment, please visit [this website](#).

Margaritas-to-go? Yep! We are one step closer to making margaritas-to-go permanent state law. The Texas House passed the bill making permanent the pandemic response provision that allowed businesses to responsibly and safely sell alcohol-to-go. That bill heads to the Senate, where it will continue through the legislative process. While it seems like a small change, making this provision permanent in state law ensures that businesses will not be encumbered by outdated regulations and Texans can continue to enjoy the benefits of supporting local restaurants from the comfort of their homes.

DISTRICT SPOTLIGHT!

Virtual Collin County Days

While I wish we could visit in person, it was my honor, along with my Legislative colleagues, to speak to many of our constituents as well as elected officials, community leaders and business professionals around Collin County. We discussed issues important to you - including what the House is doing to help with last months electrical failure, tax-payer funded lobbying, and broadband access for all. Thank you to the Plano Chamber of Commerce for organizing this great event!



God Bless you, friends. And God Bless Texas! As always, call or e-mail me if I can serve you in any way.

All My Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeff Leach". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jeff Leach

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