WHAT I KNOW ABOUT THE TEXAS GOVERNMENT AND THE PASSING OF A BILL.

CAN I PASS THE TEST?

Branches of Government in Texas

- The Executive Branch
  - The Governor
- The Judicial Branch
  - Texas Supreme Court
  - State Courts
- Legislative Branch
  - House of Representative
  - Senate

How Many Members in the Legislative Branch?

House of Representatives -150

Senate - 31

Who Presides Over The Two Chambers

- Senate
  - Lieutenant Governor
- House of Representatives
  - Speaker of the House chosen by its members

Introducing A Bill

A Representative or Senator gets an idea for a bill by listening to their constituents

Researches to determine what state law needs to be changed or created to solve the problem

A bill is then written by the legislator, often with legal assistance from the Texas Legislative Council

The bill is then introduced by a member of the house or senate in its own chamber

Legislators can introduce bills in the first 60 calendar days of a regular session

After a bill is introduced, a short description of the bill, **called a caption,** is read aloud while the chamber is in session

The Committee Process In The House

- Once the bill is read in the Chamber, the presiding officer assigns the bill to a committee
- The chair of each committee decides when the committee will meet and which bills will be considered
- The house rules permit a house committee or subcommittee to meet:
  - (1) in a public hearing where testimony is heard and where official action may be taken on bills, resolutions, or other matters;
  - (2) in a formal meeting where the members may discuss and take official action without hearing public testimony; or
  - (3) in a work session for discussion of matters before the committee without taking formal action.

Senate Process

- In the senate, testimony may be heard and official action may be taken at any meeting of a senate committee or subcommittee. Public testimony is almost always solicited on bills, allowing citizens the opportunity to present arguments on different sides of an issue.

Public Hearings

- A house committee or subcommittee holding a public hearing during a legislative session must post notice of the hearing at least five calendar days before the hearing during a regular session and at least 24 hours in advance during a special session.
- For a formal meeting or a work session, written notice must be posted and sent to each member of the committee two hours in advance of the meeting or an announcement must be filed with the journal clerk and read while the house is in session.
- A senate committee or subcommittee must post notice of a meeting at least 24 hours before the meeting.

Consideration of a Bill

- After considering a bill, a committee may choose to take no action or may issue a report on the bill.
- The committee report, expressing the committee's recommendations regarding action on a bill:
  - includes a record of the committee's vote on the report
  - the text of the bill as reported by the committee
  - a detailed bill analysis
  - a fiscal note or other impact statement, as necessary.
- The report is then printed, and a copy is distributed to every member of the house or senate.

House Calendar Committees And Senate Consideration

In the House, a copy of the committee report is sent to either the Committee on Calendars or the Committee on Local and Consent Calendars for placement on a calendar for consideration by the full house.

In the Senate, local and noncontroversial bills are scheduled for senate consideration by the Senate Administration Committee. All other bills in the senate are placed on the regular order of business for consideration by the full senate in the order in which the bills were reported from senate committee. A bill on the regular order of business may not be brought up for floor consideration unless the senate sponsor of the bill has filed a written notice of intent to suspend the regular order of business for consideration of the bill.

Floor Action

- When a bill comes up for consideration by the full house or senate, it receives its second reading.
- The bill is read, again by caption only, and then debated by the full membership of the chamber.
- Any member may offer an amendment, but it must be approved by a majority of the members present and voting to be adopted. The members then vote on whether to pass the bill.
- The bill is then considered by the full body again on third reading and final passage. A bill may be amended again on third reading, but amendments at this stage require a two-thirds majority for adoption.
- Although the Texas Constitution requires a bill to be read on three separate days in each house before it can have the force of law, this constitutional rule may be suspended by a four-fifths vote of the house in which the bill is pending.
- The senate routinely suspends this constitutional provision in order to give a bill an immediate third reading after its second reading consideration.
- The house, however, rarely suspends this provision, and third reading of a bill in the house normally occurs on the day following its second reading consideration.

Floor Action Continued

- In either house, a bill may be passed on a voice vote or a record vote. In the house, record votes are tallied by an electronic vote board controlled by buttons on each member's desk. In the senate, record votes are taken by calling the roll of the members.
- If a bill receives a majority vote on third reading, it is considered passed. When a bill is passed in the house where it originated, the bill is engrossed, and a new copy of the bill which incorporates all corrections and amendments is prepared and sent to the opposite chamber for consideration.
- In the second house, the bill follows basically the same steps it followed in the first house. When the bill is passed in the opposite house, it is returned to the originating chamber with any amendments that have been adopted simply attached to the bill.

Action on the Other House's Amendments and Conference Committees

- If a bill is returned to the originating chamber with amendments, the originating chamber can either agree to the amendments or request a conference committee to work out differences between the house version and the senate version. If the amendments are agreed to, the bill is put in final form, signed by the presiding officers, and sent to the governor.
- Conference committees are composed of five members from each house appointed by the presiding officers. Once the conference committee reaches agreement, a conference committee report is prepared and must be approved by at least three of the five conferees from each house. Conference committee reports are voted on in each house and must be approved or rejected without amendment. If approved by both houses, the bill is signed by the presiding officers and sent to the governor.

Governor’s Action

- Upon receiving a bill, the governor has 10 days in which to sign the bill, veto it, or allow it to become law without a signature.
- If the governor vetoes the bill and the legislature is still in session, the bill is returned to the house in which it originated with an explanation of the governor's objections.
- A two-thirds majority in each house is required to override the veto. If the governor neither vetoes nor signs the bill within 10 days, the bill becomes a law.
- 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.

Constitutional Amendments

- Proposed amendments to the Texas Constitution are in the form of joint resolutions instead of bills and require a vote of two-thirds of the entire membership in each house for adoption.
- Joint resolutions are not sent to the governor for approval, but are filed directly with the secretary of state.
- A joint resolution proposing an amendment to the Texas Constitution does not become effective until it is approved by Texas voters in a general election.

LOBBYING TIPS

KNOW THE LOBBYING LAWS

Constituents have the U.S. First Amendment right to speak and write with the officials for whom they vote. If one needs to lobby other elected officials, check with state and national laws governing lobbying. It’s usually not expensive to register as a lobbyist, and it may be a requirement to speak/write with those legislators or their staff for whom you don’t vote. Stay legal.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS COUNT

If lobbying in person, dress in business attire. Pay attention to details in your attire, such as polished shoes. Asking for a vote is serious business in a legislator's mind. Typically, it involves commitments of funds and a commitment that might be difficult to explain to his/her constituency at election time.

Whether writing, testifying on behalf of a bill or speaking directly to a legislator or legislative staff member, use correct grammar, punctuation and spelling.

Every legislator's staff member is important—every secretary, every aide, every intern, every spouse. They are his/her gate keepers and timekeepers. Know and remember to use their names when returning. If you can't meet with your legislator that day, ask when it might be convenient to do so. Leave a message, make an appointment that works and say thank you for even a few minutes of time with a staff member, especially during the legislative sessions. They also know where/when/and which groups are hosting the after-session/committee meetings parties are on that day. A great deal of business gets done at those parties. Get an invitation and work the room. Business can also be discussed over lunch with your legislator(s). Get a lunch appointment through his/her
secretary.

What is/are Your Legislative Priorty(ies)?

Know your group's agenda and/or your personal agenda for the legislative session. Read the complete bills that govern that agenda – don't just read a summary. Know what parts of the bill are most important. Know what you can support/negate and what you can give in negotiations.

Build trust by being knowledgeable, trustworthy with independently verified facts/figures and timely with your information. You will become that legislator's/staff member's go-to person. Never lie or misrepresent facts/figures.

Before, During, After Legislative Sessions

Track bills as they progress through the system. Know the legislative rules/system. House and Senate rules are public information. Build rapport with legislators and their staff before the bills you wish to support or negate reach consideration at any level of the system from introduction to passage. Then use that rapport to greater advantage with emails and texts to influential legislators/staff.

Know the author(s)/co-signer(s) of the bills you wish to support or wish to lobby against. What are their districts' needs? What are most of their constituents' needs? They will most likely follow those needs since that's their job and doing so gets them re-elected. Be respectful when the legislators' needs don't align with your needs. Tomorrow, you may need their vote on a different topic. Lobbying doesn't work well when bridges are permanently burned.

If your interest group/professional association hires professional lobbyists/governmental specialists, follow their lead in all matters. Keep communication with them open. Report in detail what you learn from meeting or corresponding with your own senator, congressman or state representative. If there's more than one staff lobbyist/governmental specialist for your group/association, know which one/ones work directly with the legislators for whom you vote. That's whom the legislator and his/her staff should best when working in your area of concern. Ask those staff lobbyists for information you need to know in working with your legislator(s).

Be concise in your presentation whether in writing or in person. Time and timing are critical in lobbying.

Hear a staff member/legislator out when meeting or corresponding with him/her. Be completely knowledgeable and validate all sides of the argument, pro or con, concerning a bill. Act like trial lawyers—they know both the prosecution and defendant's arguments before they enter a courtroom. Present facts/figures which have been verified through several sources. Know those facts and figures by heart. Don't waste a legislator or staff member's time trying to look up information. If you need to do so, admit you don't know the answer to their question, but promise you will find out and get back to them promptly with that answer, and then always do so, even if it's not a favorable answer to your lobbying goals.

Know examples of constituents who will be positively or negatively impacted by the bill(s). Remain truthful. Being able to do so makes it real for the legislature and puts a face on the issue.

Be ready to walk with a legislator and present your case at the same time. Even elevator/stairs hold important seconds in which to get your point across.

When the legislative session isn't being held, invite your legislators to an informal sit-down, with potluck meeting with your group and invite the community. Be receptive to what he/she has to say even if the message isn't what you want to hear. Create a polite dialogue atmosphere. Identify areas in which you can agree.

Following up after the legislative session is critical. Thank the legislator for the bills on which he/she supported your personal or group's agenda. Don't become threatening.

Be polite. Your vote during the next election is a private matter. Your group can support an incumbent or his/her opponent during the election. Dwell on the facts/figures. Don't make it a dirty, threatening campaign. Incumbents win often, and if threatened, have long memories during the next session. Dwell on well, and independently research facts/figures during campaigns.

During and between sessions, work to develop coalitions between/among interest groups on important issues. Look at the example of the recent WEP repeal. Separately, no interest group/association had historically been able to get the filed bills to be considered in committee which killed the bills. When the coalition was built among all interest groups, the repeal of WEP happened. Groups/associations will not always agree on everything, but find the common ground when and where it exists. There's safety and power in numbers among like minds.

How to Follow A Bill

- **Texas Legislature Online – Bill Lookup**

https://search.app/Skw8KyUs7njXzWvZ8

https://capitol.texas.gov/billlookup/billnumber.aspx

capitol.texas.gov/home.aspx

877.824.7038