

86th Texas Legislature:

CJCAT AT THE CAPITOL



As defined in the Constitution of the County Judges and Commissioners Association of Texas (CJCAT), “It shall be the purpose of this Association to create a greater interest in county government and to unite its members to promote better business methods in county government, and to foster the general welfare of county government throughout all counties in the State of Texas.” When it comes to the counties’ “general welfare,” the Texas Legislature is paramount. As an arm of the State, Texas counties can only do those actions that are specifically authorized by Texas law. Equally important, Texas counties must do those actions that are required by law. This partnership means Association involvement in the Legislature is crucial when it comes to protecting and promoting county government.

The Association’s general counsel, Jim Allison, works year-round monitoring legislative issues during the biennial sessions of the Legislature and the interim period. The Association’s Legislative Committee members partner with Jim throughout the legislative sessions, traveling to the Capitol to meet with lawmakers and their staff and testify at public hearings. Association Past President Woodrow W. “Woody” Gossom Jr., Wichita County Judge, paired with Jim Allison the week of April 15 attending briefings, discussing strategy, visiting with representatives and senators, testifying before House and Senate committees, and monitoring legislation. Judge Gossom and Jim were periodically joined by Rick Thompson, legislative liaison from the Texas Association of Counties.

County Progress was privileged to join Judge Gossom and Jim as they “worked the Legislature” and is pleased to offer this review of the CJCAT at the Capitol.



Jim Allison discusses the ramifications of Senate Bill 2260 with Harold Stone, chief of staff to Sen. Peter R. Flores. S.B. 2260 addresses the grant program that distributes money from the County Transportation Infrastructure Fund.



From left: Rick Thompson, legislative liaison with the Texas Association of Counties; Wichita County Judge Woodrow W. "Woody" Gossom Jr., a past president of the CJCAT; and Jim Allison, CJCAT general counsel.



Judge Gossom and Jim Allison attend a briefing and strategy session at the office of the Conference of Urban Counties on Monday evening and a legislative breakfast at the Texas Association of Counties on Tuesday morning in preparation for committee hearings and personal visits with lawmakers. Dozens of bills were discussed during these and other planning meetings throughout the week.



Throughout the week, Judge Gossom, Jim Allison, and often times Rick Thompson, grouped at the Capitol Grill located in the Capitol Extension, room E1.002, to register positions on bills, prepare hearing testimony, and map out a plan to meet with lawmakers and staff.



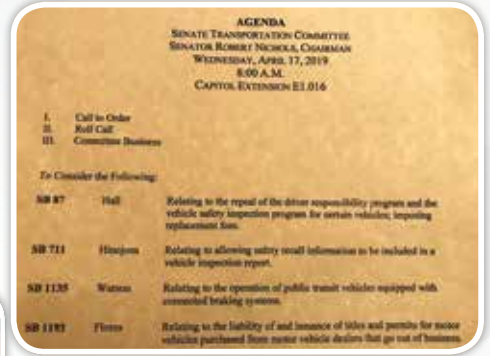
Andrew Herrell, legislative director for Rep. Matt Krause, left, answers questions regarding House Bill 1493 relating to weight limitations for over-the-road buses.



Judge Gossom and Jim Allison discuss House Bill 2620 with Francisco "Paco" Sanchez, legislative director for Rep. Armando "Mando" Martinez. H.B. 2620 relates to oversized or overweight vehicles and the enforcement of motor vehicle size and weight limitations.



Judge Gossom and Jim Allison complete registration cards on Senate Bill 2260, deliver their cards to the clerk, and then take their seats in the hearing room until S.B. 2260 is called. During his testimony, Jim Allison, second from left, discusses stipulations in the grant program that distributes money to counties impacted by oil and gas road damage. DeWitt County Judge Daryl Fowler, far right, also testified at the hearing.



SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

Written Registration Card

Bill Number: _____

Placed on Bill (Yes/No) Check One

Yes Assent Dis Business Dis

Do you wish to testify? Yes No (No testimony, return only) Check if witness

Do you wish an official written statement? Yes No

Name (print): _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ Phone: _____

I certify that the above information is true and correct, and that I am a resident of this county. Any false information, omission or misstatement of information in the above information shall constitute a crime under the laws of this state and may be subject to criminal prosecution.

Signature: _____ Date: _____



Throughout the week, Judge Gossom and Jim Allison monitored proceedings on the House and Senate floors, often using multiple monitors so they could stay up-to-date on both chambers when they met simultaneously. Left photo: View from the gallery of the Texas House of Representatives. Right photo: Sen. Kel Seliger responds to Senate Bill 2 on the Senate floor.





Rick Thompson and Jim Allison visit with Rep. Kyle Kacal to discuss property tax/ revenue cap legislation facing the House of Representatives.



Judge Gossom expresses concerns about House Bill 281 to Rep. James Frank, who represents Wichita County. H.B. 281 would place limitations on lobbying efforts on behalf of counties.

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7,300-plus bills filed
1,900 bills with potential county impact



Judge Gossom and Jim Allison testify before the House Committee on Transportation regarding House Bill 4280. They specifically addressed the provision in the bill that makes a county eligible for a Transportation Infrastructure Fund grant if at least \$10 million in state severance taxes were collected in the county in the fiscal year preceding the fiscal year in which the county applies for a grant. Judge Gossom indicated that while his county does not meet the \$10 million threshold, Wichita County still sustains road damage. Both Judge Gossom and Jim Allison asked the committee to consider deleting the \$10 million threshold. On May 2, Rep. Geanie Morrison, sponsor of the bill, deleted the \$10 million severance tax requirement meaning all counties will continue to be eligible for the county road repair grants through the Transportation Infrastructure Fund. As of press time Jim Allison was urging officials “to redouble our efforts to obtain the state appropriation for this program.”

County Progress was privileged to shadow the County Judges and Commissioners Association of Texas representatives and observe firsthand their efforts to protect county government and promote effective and efficient local-decision making. The days began at dawn and usually went well into dusk as the CJCAT team took every opportunity available to share information, all the while displaying politeness and professionalism.

