Passed and passed over: A look at what happened to major Texas bills

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Over the 140-day regular session of the 85th Texas Legislature, lawmakers debated a wide range of issues, including abortion, public bathroom use and how to address a crisis in the foster care system. More than 6,600 bills were filed. Gov. Greg Abbott has signed more than 1,000 bills into law, and he has vetoed 50 bills. More than 150 bills have advanced without the governor’s signature. Here’s a look at the fate of some of the regular session’s most high-profile measures.

BILL STATUS
Signed bills  Failed bills

Bills signed into law

Immigration enforcement
Senate Bill 4

Gov. Greg Abbott has signed SB 4, which allows police to inquire about the immigration status of people they lawfully detain. It also bans “sanctuary”
jurisdictions by making sheriffs, constables, police chiefs and other local leaders subject to Class A misdemeanor charges if they don’t cooperate with federal authorities and honor requests from immigration agents to hold noncitizen inmates who are subject to deportation. The law is scheduled to go into effect on Sept. 1.

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**Anti-abortion**

Senate Bill 8

Abbott has signed Senate Bill 8, a sweeping measure that bans the most common second-trimester abortion procedure and changes how health care providers dispose of fetal remains. The law also bans facilities from donating aborted fetal tissue to medical researchers, and aims to outlaw “partial-birth abortions,” which are already illegal under federal law. The law is scheduled to go into effect on Sept. 1.

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- Sweeping anti-abortion bill heads to governor’s desk

**Dallas/Houston pension reform**

Senate Bill 2190, House Bill 3158

Measures aimed at addressing pension problems in Houston and Dallas made it to Abbott’s desk in the last days of the session. He ultimately signed both. Senate Bill 2190 addresses pensions for Houston firefighters, police and municipal employees. Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner praised the bill, but the city’s firefighters opposed it. House Bill 3158 is aimed at preventing Dallas’ retirement fund for first responders from becoming insolvent within a decade. The two cities have among the biggest pension shortfalls in the nation.

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- Dallas’ failing pension fund poised for overhaul as bill heads for Abbott’s desk
- Houston pension bill heads for governor’s desk, but firefighters are still mad
Weather damage insurance

House Bill 1774

House Bill 1774, which goes into effect Sept. 1, will discourage property owners from suing insurers over weather-related claims. Supporters of the bill want to crack down on what they characterize as an increase in frivolous lawsuits. Trial lawyers and consumer groups don’t deny the existence of a small group of bad actors but say legal action is often warranted and correlates with insurers denying claims.

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› Texas Senate sends bill to governor discouraging weather-related lawsuits

Straight-ticket voting

House Bill 25

Over the objections of Democrats, lawmakers sent a bill to Abbott that would eliminate straight-ticket voting in all elections beginning in September 2020. Abbott signed the bill on June 1.

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› Gov. Abbott signs bill to eliminate straight-ticket voting beginning in 2020

Texting while driving

House Bill 62

Texas had been one of four states without a statewide ban on texting and driving. Advocates had tried for more than a decade to persuade Texas lawmakers to approve one. In 2011, then-Gov. Rick Perry vetoed such a ban. Now a statewide ban is law after Abbott signed HB 62. It takes effect Sept. 1.

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› Gov. Abbott signs statewide ban on texting while driving

State budget
Senate Bill 1

House and Senate budget leaders settled on a plan to spend $216.8 billion over the next two years that boosts funding for the state’s beleaguered child welfare agency, increases the number of state troopers on the Texas-Mexico border and avoids serious reforms to the state’s much-criticized school finance system. Abbott signed the bill into law on June 12, but he vetoed tens of millions of dollars in funding for various programs, including measures meant to improve the region’s air quality and assist impoverished border communities. The budget is the only bill the Legislature is required to approve during the session.

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- Texas governor signs $217 billion budget, vetoes $120 million
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A-F school ratings

House Bill 22

The Legislature first approved an A-F system for rating school districts and schools in 2015. Under HB 22, signed into law by Abbott, schools and districts will be graded A-F in three categories: student achievement, student progress and closing the gaps. The state will use standardized test scores to grade elementary and middle schools, and a range of additional factors, such as graduation rates, to grade high schools. Districts will get their first set of grades in August 2018, and individual schools will get theirs in August 2019.

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- Gov. Abbott signs bill overhauling A-F school, district ratings

Child welfare reform

House Bills 4, 5, and 7, Senate Bill 11

The state’s foster care system is under a spotlight following headlines of children sleeping in hotels and offices, caseworkers grappling with high caseloads and endangered children going unseen following abuse
allegations. Abbott designated the issue one of four emergencies of the session. He signed four measures aimed at overhauling the child welfare system at a ceremony two days after the end of the session.

HB 4 increases the amount of money given to relative caregivers. HB 7 aims to improve the process by which the state removes kids from dangerous homes.

Both chambers passed compromised versions of HB 5, which makes the troubled Department of Family and Protective Services a standalone agency, and SB 11, which shifts Texas to a "community-based care" model for handling some endangered children and allowing contracted nonprofits to monitor children in foster care and adoptive homes.

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- Abbott signs bills aimed at addressing crisis in child welfare system
- Texas House passes child welfare reforms

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**Convention of States**

**Senate Bill 21**

Abbott published a book last year about why he favors a convention of states to amend the U.S. Constitution. He's made measures related to that one of his priorities for the session. Both chambers approved resolutions (Senate Joint Resolution 2 and Senate Joint Resolution 38), calling for a convention of states to approve amendments limiting terms for U.S. officials and curbing federal government spending and power and another canceling all but one of the Legislature's prior calls for one. Abbott has signed SB 21, which allows only state lawmakers to serve as Texas delegates to such a convention.

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**Religious liberty for adoption agencies**

**House Bill 3859**
HB 3859, among other things, allows adoption agencies to reject potential parents on religious grounds. It also extends religious liberty protections to child welfare providers while caring for abused and neglected children in foster or Child Protective Services custody.

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**Ride-hailing**

House Bill 100

Both Uber and Lyft announced plans to re-launch their services in Austin on the last day of the legislative session, when Abbott signed a bill that overrides local regulations on ride-hailing services.

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- Uber, Lyft returning to Austin on Monday

**“Sandra Bland Act”**

Senate Bill 1849

The “Sandra Bland Act,” or SB 1849, is named after a a black 28-year-old woman who was found dead in the Waller County Jail days after being arrested during a routine traffic stop. SB 1849 mandates that county jails divert people with mental health and substance abuse issues toward treatment, makes it easier for defendants with a mental illness or intellectual disability to receive a personal bond, and requires that independent law enforcement agencies investigate jail deaths. Near the end of the session, Bland’s family criticized lawmakers’ removal of certain provisions related to police stops before passing the measure.

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- Texas Gov. Abbott signs “Sandra Bland Act” into law

**Voter ID overhaul**

Senate Bill 5
Republicans tweaked the state’s 2011 voter identification law in response to court findings that the current law discriminated against black and Latino voters. The two chambers passed different versions of SB 5 but then worked out a compromise version which the two chambers approved in the last weekend of the session. If Texas leaders hadn’t approved the bill, which Abbott has signed, some predicted a judge was likely to place Texas under federal oversight of its election laws.

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**“Buy American” steel**

*Senate Bill 1289*

Abbott signed SB 1289, which requires large state projects — such as buildings, roads and bridges — to purchase iron and steel from an American supplier if the cost doesn’t exceed 20 percent more than the price of cheaper, foreign imports. Under the bill, any country’s iron and steel can be used if American suppliers aren’t prepared to supply a project or there is a compelling state interest.

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**Bills that failed to pass the Legislature**

**Bathroom legislation**

*Senate Bill 6, Senate Bill 2078*
Perhaps the most contentious issue of the session has been over whether Texas should block transgender people from using publicly owned restrooms that match their gender identities. SB 6, the bill pushed by Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, died when the House refused to hear it. The House offered its own proposal in a vaguely worded amendment to SB 2078 that focused on public schools. The Senate rejected that, and the regular session ended with no legislation passing on the issue. But Abbott has included the topic in his plans for this summer’s special session.

*This legislation failed during the regular session, but the issue is set to be brought up again in a special session starting July 18, 2017.*

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**Property tax reform**

*Senate Bill 2, Senate Bill 669*

Both Abbott and Patrick have said it’s a priority to pass legislation requiring local governments to hold automatic tax rate elections whenever they have proposed property revenue increases over a certain threshold. SB 2, the Senate’s leading property tax reform measure, died when the House refused to hear it. The House responded by amending another measure, SB 669. The Senate requested a conference committee on that bill to explore a compromise, no deal was reached before the regular session ended. Abbott has included the topic in his plans for this summer’s special session.

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**Medical marijuana**

*House Bill 2107*