



Indications that compromise might not be so far away arose last week in the redrawing of the House, Senate and U.S congressional districts of Texas. Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott, acting on behalf of the state, and the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and MALDEF (Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund) released statements of commitment to the negotiation process. The statements were made following orders by Judge Orlando Garcia, U.S. District Court, Western District of Texas, in San Antonio, for plaintiffs and defendants in the redistricting lawsuits to work together to resolve matters and to appear at a Feb. 15 court hearing.

LULAC and MALDEF have petitioned for the maps to be drawn to include more minority opportunity districts allowing citizens more power in choosing who they want to represent them. The state's position has been that redistricting maps drawn by the Texas Legislature are legal and enforceable in accordance with the U.S. Voting Rights Act of 1965. But Section 5 of the Act requires that in redrawing district boundaries, maps must be submitted to the federal government for preclearance in order to prevent discrimination against minorities. The maps enacted by the Texas Legislature last spring were not granted preclearance. Revised sets of maps have been submitted, talks continue, and although pressure is on to resolve any outstanding matters this week, a complete resolution still could take weeks. Abbott said he thinks compromise may be achieved in time for the Texas primaries to be conducted in April. The original date for the Texas primaries was Super Tuesday, March 6, when 10 other states will conduct their primaries.

Legislators make pipeline plea

Last fall, the Obama administration postponed until 2013 possible approval of pipeline's permit

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application over unresolved environmental concerns. On Feb. 6, five state senators and Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst sent a letter to U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and House Speaker John Boehner in hopes of urging Congress immediately to approve construction of the Keystone XL Pipeline part of which runs from Canada through the Great Plains and East Texas to the Gulf of Mexico. In their letter, Dewhurst and Republican Sens. Bob Deuell of Greenville, Troy Fraser of Horseshoe Bay, Joan Huffman of Houston, Mike Jackson of La Porte and Tommy Williams of The Woodlands, wrote that construction of the pipeline would “create 20,000 jobs, support 118,000 spinoff jobs for local businesses and generate more than \$20 billion in economic output.”

Sales tax revenue climbs

Texas Comptroller Susan Combs announced last week that state sales tax revenue in January was \$2 billion, up 9.5 percent compared to January 2011. Combs, who said collections have increased for 22 consecutive months, pointed out that the recent monthly increase was led by the oil and natural gas-related sectors, and restaurants and services sectors also showed significant gains.

Combs warns of cost of drought

Texas Comptroller Susan Combs on Feb. 8 released a 16-page document describing the effects of the 2011 drought, current and future water resources in the state and solutions to help solve the water crisis.

According to the document titled “The Impact of the 2011 Drought and Beyond” the state’s current water plan predicts demand will increase by 22 percent by 2060 and should Texas experience another “mega-drought” as severe as the 1950s drought, “it could cost Texas businesses and workers nearly \$116 billion in income by 2060.”

Higher speeds for some stretches

Speed limit increases for nearly 1,500 miles of interstate highways in the Lone Star State have

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either been posted or soon will be by TxDOT, as announced at the Texas Transportation Commission meeting on Jan. 26. House Bill 1353 authorized the commission to increase the legal speed limit on certain portions of highway in some 60 counties to 75 miles per hour and eliminate the 65 mile per hour nighttime speed limit as appropriate. Prior to the enactment of HB 1353 last May, Texas had 1,445 miles of 75 mph speed limits and 521 miles of 80 mph speed limits designated on certain state highways, the Texas Department of Transportation said. The bill actually took effect on Sept. 1, 2011, but signs are being changed “as soon as practicable.” The Highway Patrol enforces posted speed limits. {jcomments on}