



Case Counts – Tuesday, February 1st (1:35 PM data)
 Confirmed Cases – 5,210,762 (28,471 new cases)
 Hospitalizations – 12,156 (7,681 available beds, 344 available adult ICU beds)
 Fatalities – 77,360 (200 new deaths)

Inside the Numbers

Positivity rate as of Monday, January 31st was 27.35% (down slightly). One month ago, there were 44,100 new cases reported, one week ago there were 49,200 new cases reported, compared to the 28,471 reported yesterday. The 12,156 COVID patients in hospitals now is 1,135 FEWER patients compared to one week ago, and COVID patients make up 19.5% of total hospital beds in the state.

As of Monday, January 31st, 20 million Texans, or 68.7% of the population have received at least one dose of the vaccine. 16.9 million people in the state are fully vaccinated, which is 58.1% of the state. So far, 5.9 million, or 20.3% of the state have gotten a booster shot. Including booster shots, a total of 41.5 million doses of the vaccine have been administered.

Trump Rally in Conroe



On Saturday, among a music festival type setting, former President Trump held a rally in Conroe that was attended by members of Congress, state legislators and several statewide officials. Garnering the most attention from Trump was Lt. Governor Dan Patrick, whom Trump credited with guiding him through the state races and providing a number of endorsements. While speaking, Trump voiced his support for Patrick, as well as incumbent Attorney General Ken Paxton. But, Trump also praised two of Paxton's opponents, Congressman Louie Gohmert and Land Commissioner George P. Bush. Trump also reiterated his support and endorsement of Governor Greg Abbott. But, when Abbott took the stage, he was met with a mix of boos and cheers from the crowd. At the rally, Trump indicated that he would be making another run for President in 2024. He also praised those involved in the Capitol insurrection, even suggesting that he would provide pardons for anyone convicted in conjunction with the January 6th event.

More Polling

The University of Houston Hobby School of Public Affairs and the Dallas Morning News/UT Tyler released polls regarding the statewide races over the weekend, with varying results. In the Hobby poll, Abbott is favored in the Republican primary by 58% of the respondents, with Allen West at 11% and Don Huffines at 7%. In the UT Tyler poll, Abbott is favored by 58%. In the general election, the polls differ. The Hobby poll has Abbott over O'Rourke by a 47% to 36% margin. But, the UT Tyler poll shows Abbott with a slimmer lead, at 48% to 43%. The only statewide incumbent that appears to be headed to a runoff in the primary election is Attorney General Ken Paxton. Paxton hovers in the high 30% range in both polls, which is not enough to meet the threshold to avoid a runoff. In the other statewide races for Comptroller, Land Commissioner, and Agriculture Commissioner, there is a significant number of undecided voters. Both polls show that at least 60% of the primary voters have yet to make up their minds in those down ballot statewide races. The Hobby poll can be found here: <https://uh.edu/hobby/election.pdf> And the UT Tyler poll can be found here: <https://www.uttyler.edu/politicalscience/files/dmn-uttyler-jan2022.pdf>

High Demand for Power This Week



A brutal cold front is predicted to hit Texas starting today, with all of north and west Texas being affected, and possibly including areas as far south as the Austin area. The Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) is predicting record high demand, which will be the first test of the season for a system that failed miserably during last winter's storm. ERCOT has yet to issue any warnings or calls for conservation, but they have begun to contact state leaders saying that the agency will have a grid management plan for the upcoming storm. Details to follow. However, most experts in the energy field feel that this coming storm will not cause widespread outages. They say the real worry would be if 75% of the state remains under 32 degrees for a sustained period of time, along with continued precipitation. This coming blast is expected to only mildly affect Houston and gulf coast region. However, if the storm does create a significant amount of precipitation, ice on power lines or ice causing trees to fall on power lines could cause power outages in the storm affected areas.

One important note. At a news conference on Tuesday, Gov. Abbott said there is a possibility that there will be a "load shed" event, meaning that due to demand, some areas will have their power cut off due to demand exceeding capacity. Why this is relevant is because in November, at the conclusion of the special sessions, Abbott was asked if enough was done during the sessions to ensure no blackouts. He responded at that time with an absolute "guarantee the lights will stay on." Yesterday's statement is obviously a significant retreat from his initial guarantee.

Operation Lone Star Draws Criticism



Fifty Democratic members of the Texas House are calling on the US Department of Justice to investigate Operation Lone Star, which is the state program that apprehends individuals suspected of crossing the border illegally. The claim of the members is that the program is violating the supremacy clause of the US Constitution, which they believe leaves immigration enforcement totally in the hands of the federal government.

In October, Gov. Abbott authorized and began Operation Lone Star, saying that the state was facing a humanitarian crisis due to the large number of migrants attempting to enter the US along the border with Mexico. At the time, Abbott was under intense scrutiny from more conservative opponents to do more to address the growing border crisis. The operation moved thousands of National Guard troops to the US/Mexico border. The operation has been plagued with problems, according to direct interviews with National Guard members stationed on the border. Service members say they have had trouble getting paid, are living in temporary trailers, and have difficulties obtaining proper clothing and gear for their mission. However, in spite of the difficulties that the troops are encountering, the mission can be considered a success. Border apprehensions along the Texas border more than doubled in 2021 compared to 2020.

No response from the Justice Department has been given at this time to the House Democrats seeking to halt the program, and with the primary election looming in less than a month, the program is very likely to continue.

Quick Hits

Lt. Governor Dan Patrick has named a special committee to address all issues related to border and security issues. The Senate Committee on Border Security will address the issues of drug smuggling, human trafficking, the threats to public safety, and the costs to all affected communities. The committee will be chaired by Senator Brian Birdwell (R, Waco), a 20 year veteran of the US Army. Also serving on the committee will be Sen. Bob Hall (R, Edgewood) a former officer in the US Air Force, and Sen. Chuy Hinojosa (D, McAllen), a Vietnam combat veteran. The charge of the committee is to oversee the funding and policies of the state's efforts to secure the border.

Murder rates in the city of Houston rose for the second year in a row, as rising homicide rates continue to be a concern for local officials and citizens. The 473 murders in Houston in 2021 were an increase of 18% from 2020, and a 71% increase from 2019. 2021 was the deadliest year in the city since 1981. Houston was not alone in the severe increase in the murder rate. Austin recorded 89 murders in 2021, compared to 44 in 2020. According to the FBI, homicides are up nearly 30% across the country.

A three judge federal panel in El Paso has denied plaintiff's request to delay the state primary elections scheduled to take place on March 1st. The panel heard a case challenging the validity of state Senate District 10, centered in Tarrant County. Plaintiffs argued that the district was drawn to intentionally dilute minority voting strength, but the judges disagreed. The panel is also scheduled to hear a collection of challenges to the newly drawn state House, Senate, and Congressional maps later in the year. Barring a successful appeal to the US Supreme Court – something that is highly unlikely – all maps will remain in place for the 2022 elections.

What's Next??

More polls will be released and more political commercials will be on your local stations between now and the March 1st election day. The last day to apply to vote by mail is February 18th. Early voting starts February 14th and lasts until February 25th.

Happy Groundhog Day, and please stay safe and warm during the coming winter weather!!

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