

State of Play: Climate, Energy, and Disaster Response

What Happened in the 89th Texas Legislature and What Comes Next

The outcome for the energy and climate portfolio was mixed at the end of the 89th Texas Legislature's regular session. Several big anti-renewable bills failed to advance out of committee in the Texas House. That's a win for affordable, reliable energy in Texas. The creation of the Energy Waste Advisory Committee and an updated statewide energy efficiency building code mean Texas will work toward reducing energy waste.

There were also disappointments during the regular session. Heat protections for outdoor workers and for inmates and staff in Texas prisons both failed to advance, as did a proposal to create a severe weather action plan and a proposal to open up Texas Energy Fund financing to energy efficiency projects.

Wildfire mitigation and response was a bipartisan success story that will benefit countless Texans, especially those who live in the Panhandle. And standardized regulations for things like battery energy storage systems, home backup power, and residential solar installers will ease the transition to cleaner and more reliable energy.

This session, the biggest question on energy was capacity. How do we make sure we have enough generation to cover the demand, especially the large increase in demand projected over the next five years? The issue of capacity is related to the issue of grid stability, which was a major focus of the 88th session in 2023. Growth of renewable energy and battery storage since the last session, along with supply chain constraints limiting new natural gas development, meant proposals intended to hamper renewables were met with opposition from a variety of constituencies.

Multiple big anti-renewable bills failed to pass during the regular session:

- SB 819 by Sen. Kolkhorst would have required unnecessarily large setbacks for wind generation
- SB 388 by Sen. King would have required new generation of renewables to match new generation of thermal generation at a 1-1 rate. New renewables not able to meet the requirement would have to pay thermal generators for “dispatchability credits.”
- SB 715 by Sen. Sparks would have implemented backup power requirements intended for new generation to be required for all generation.
- SB 383 by Sen. Middleton would have prohibited interconnection between any offshore wind turbine and the ERCOT grid.
- SB 3556 by Sen. Middleton would have allowed Texas Parks and Wildlife Division to veto any wind project in a county containing a National Wildlife Refuge. Amendments changed the language to require a constructive advisory relationship between wind developers and TPWD designed to ensure the safety of wildlife in the vicinity of wind turbines.

On climate, four bills were proposed that would have banned local or state action on climate in different ways. These bills all failed to progress:

- HB 4313 and HB 4314 both by Rep. Bell would have both limited or ended city and county government efforts to mitigate or adapt to climate change.
- SB 495 by Sen. Sparks would have prevented the Texas Department of Insurance from making recommendations based on climate change.
- HCR 138 would have created a constitutional amendment that would prohibit the Legislature from assessing a tax on the carbon content of a fuel.

A suite of bills aimed at mitigating and responding to wildfires in the state passed:

- HB 143 and HB 145 by Rep. King requires oil and gas operators and the Public Utility Commission of Texas to assess risk and fix damaged electrical equipment at abandoned oil and gas wells.
- HB 3000 supports emergency responders by streamlining communications between different groups of first responders or by creating a database of firefighting equipment suitable for fighting wildfires.
- HB 144 requires wire and pole utilities to do a more thorough job inspecting and maintaining power poles, identifying weak poles before a windstorm could knock them down.
- SB 34 helps prepare volunteer fire departments for wildfire prevention and management.

One big disappointment was the failure of two bills that would have promoted the health and safety of workers and prison inmates in cases of extreme heat:

- HB 3006 by Rep. Canales would have required investment in air conditioning at Texas Department of Criminal Justice prisons.
- HB 446 by Rep. Flores would have required heat protections for outdoor workers.

Proposals promoting energy efficiency yielded mixed results:

- SB 783 by Sen. Menéndez will update the state’s energy efficiency building codes. This bill passed.
- HB 5323 by Rep. King, which will create the Energy Waste Advisory Committee, passed and was signed by the governor, while SB 2717 by Sen. Menéndez did not.
- A proposal that would have exempted energy efficiency upgrades from property tax increases, HB 1483 by Rep. Gervin-Hawkins, did not get out of committee.
- HB 4016 by Rep. Anchia, a particularly practical and promising bill that would have prohibited wasteful electrical resistance heaters from being installed in new construction, also failed to make it out of committee.
- HB 3511 by Rep. Anchia would have enabled electric vehicles to integrate with the grid, supplying excess power back to the grid at periods of peak demand. HB 3511 passed the House but was not taken up by the Senate.
- HB 5323 by Rep. King would have allowed the use of Texas Energy Fund money for energy efficiency projects. It did not pass the House.

In response to increasing demand for interconnection requests from new facilities requiring significant amounts of electricity, like data centers, the Legislature passed SB 6, which requires all new or potential large loads to provide transparent information to utilities, ERCOT and the PUC. New requirements for data centers and other large loads seeking interconnection include:

- A new application process
- A requirement that new large loads to help pay for new transmission
- A requirement that new facilities have a plan about what to do when demand for electricity exceeds supply, including requiring some facilities to generate electricity onsite so that residential service is not interrupted when the grid is strained

The interconnection queue—the list of projects awaiting interconnection by ERCOT—recently doubled, largely because of requests from data centers. Data center construction projects have created excess demand for gas turbines, raising costs and slowing timelines for gas turbines needed for new gas-fired power plants.

New regulations passed on battery storage and home backup power will make these technologies easier to install and operate and help battery storage facilities integrate with city and county emergency management planning:

- SB 1036 by Sen. Zaffirini creates a license for solar system installers.
- SB 1202 by Sen. King streamlines permitting for rooftop solar systems.
- HB 3824 by Rep. King establishes safety regulations for battery energy storage facilities.

Connecting Texas with Federal Policy

Renewables

Several federal policy decisions affected progress on climate and energy issues in Texas. HR 1 (also called the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act”) made changes to the Inflation Reduction Act, including:

- Winding down incentives for new renewable energy and battery storage development. This includes incentives supporting new manufacturing projects in Texas
- Winding down the Clean Energy Tax Credits and rebate programs for electric vehicles

A bipartisan coalition of lawmakers, stakeholders, and advocates came together to tell the Texas Legislature that renewable energy helps Texas meet growing demand for electricity, helps keep energy prices low, provides benefits to landowners who lease land for turbines and solar arrays, and provides other benefits. Demand for electricity continues to grow in Texas, and renewables and battery storage are among the cheapest and least complicated technologies to install.

Methane

Methane emitted from oil and gas equipment is a public health threat and an environmental problem. Methane is also a greenhouse gas. The good news is that methane stays in the atmosphere for a shorter amount of time. Cutting methane emission is a fast way to lower the concentration of climate-harming greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

Despite the benefits of methane mitigation, Texas leadership has historically resisted state-level methane regulations. That means Texans count on strong federal regulations to keep our air clean. This year, the federal government rolled back some important recent methane regulations.

The federal methane fee was repealed by Congressional Review Act early in 2025. The methane fee would have charged methane emitters a fee based on the amount of methane emitted in excess of methane rule requirements.

The compliance deadline for the Environmental Protection Agency’s methane rule, which prohibits routine flaring and requires oil and gas operators to stop methane leaks, was delayed by one year until 2027.

Given the benefits of methane mitigation, and the proven effectiveness of regulations, it is important to keep asking the Texas Legislature and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality to create strong methane standards for Texas.

Connecting Texas Policy With International Climate Policy

Scientists tell us that the global community has made some important progress on climate action, but it is not nearly enough. At this year's Conference of the Parties (COP), in Belém, Brazil, negotiators once again warned us that we are in a critical decade. Ambitious action to eliminate greenhouse gas emissions, transition to cleaner forms of energy, and adapt to climate impacts is essential, both to prevent the worst impacts of climate change and to adjust to the reality of climate change that has already occurred.

In order to achieve the long-term temperature goal set out in Article 2, Parties aim to reach global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible, recognizing that peaking will take longer for developing country Parties, and to undertake rapid reductions thereafter in accordance with best available science, so as to achieve a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century, on the basis of equity, and in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty.

Paris Climate Accords

The United States has withdrawn from the Paris Agreement, so attention has turned to ways that subnational governments lead the way on climate action. Local and state governments implement the policy that makes or breaks climate goals. Things like energy building codes, fleet management, and public transit make a big difference on a community's emissions. That means state-level advocacy is of global importance.

Since Texas is a major producer of fossil fuels and a major emitter of greenhouse gases, advocacy in the state influences global climate goals:

- Methane mitigation: Asking the Texas Legislature and Texas Commission on Environmental Quality to enact strong regulations on methane emissions from oil and gas operations improves air quality and lowers atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gases.
- Energy efficiency requirements: Supporting state-level programs that encourage energy customers to save energy by using efficient appliances or improving insulation and HVAC systems not only saves energy but also saves money on energy bills and makes homes more comfortable
- Advocating for renewable energy development in Texas lowers our dependence on fossil fuel generation, makes the grid more stable, and lowers energy costs for consumers

Energy

Concerns about data centers have shifted to advocacy in local communities. Energy customers are concerned about higher energy prices and lower electrical reliability as data centers consume an increasing share of the electricity produced in Texas. Opposition expressed at local planning and zoning meetings and other venues points to the need for better guidance from the Legislature.

- Renewable energy paired with battery storage is a reliable source of new electrical generation, and it is much faster to install and operate than fossil fuel generation. Texas needs more generation, not less.

Floods, Disaster Response, and the Special Sessions

In response to the tragic floods that struck the Hill Country in July, 2025, Lt. Governor Patrick and House Speaker Burrows formed the Select Committees on Disaster Preparedness and Flooding in the Senate and House, respectively. The committees held several hearings during the special sessions. Each hearing focused on a different aspect of the preparation for and response to the disaster:

- In the first hearing, committee members heard testimony from Texas Division of Emergency Management Director Nim Kidd, personnel from the Texas Water Development Board, and staff from the Upper Guadalupe River Authority. Testimony covered state-level emergency preparation and response and the status of flood warning systems and other safety measures in the Upper Guadalupe River area.
- The second hearing, held in Kerrville, featured emergency management personnel and first responders in the affected area. Testimony included a timeline of the events of July 3-4 as well as details about emergency procedures and responsibilities for city and county personnel.
- Parents of children killed by the flood at Camp Mystic in Hunt, Texas were invited to testify at a third committee hearing in Austin.

Testimony from Kerr County and Kerrville first responders and county leadership revealed troubling lapses in leadership during the critical overnight hours when the worst of the flooding took place. Testimony from the Upper Guadalupe River Authority and county judges highlighted the challenges of funding important but expensive flood infrastructure projects. Testimony from Texas Division of Emergency Management Chief Nim Kidd identified improvements to be made in ensuring the education and training of county emergency management personnel and first responders.

Lawmakers plan to work on improving flood safety throughout the interim and into the 90th Legislature, but they did pass some key funding and safety improvements before the conclusion of the second special session.

- SB 1 and HB 1 require written emergency plans and training for staff and volunteers

at campgrounds and overnight camps and prohibits placement of camp cabins in floodplains.

- SB 3 establishes a \$50 million grant program to help communities pay for flood warning siren equipment. Eligible communities will be determined by the Texas Water Development Board.
- SB 5 allocates funding for several flood monitoring and forecasting improvements, including a grant to Texas Tech University to develop expanded hazard monitoring and forecasting capabilities and funds for counties affected by the July disaster to improve flood warning infrastructure

Looking ahead to 2026

Flood Warning Systems/Disaster Response

The Disaster Preparedness and Flooding Committee has promised to continue working through the interim into the next legislative session. This is an opportunity to talk about increasing incidence of hazardous weather in Texas and ask what is being done to support long-term resilience.

- What locations in your district are vulnerable to flash flooding, wildfires, tornadoes, or hurricanes?
- Is your district or community eligible for state flood infrastructure funding? FEMA funding?
- Ask your local and city government about flood infrastructure. Programs exist to make improvements and community-scale infrastructure projects benefit a larger number of people than programs targeted at individual homeowners.
- Express support for better understanding of climate change and impacts in Texas, especially on hazards like flash flooding. Encourage lawmakers to check out resources like the, “Assessment of Historic and Future Trends of Extreme Weather in Texas, 1900-2036.”
- Talk about the important role of faith-based disaster relief organizations after a disaster, especially if you have experience working as a disaster relief volunteer. Share your experience with your elected official.

Texas Impact equips people of faith and conscience with information, opportunities, and outreach tools to educate their communities and engage with lawmakers on pressing public policy issues.

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