

# PERSPECTIVE

March 12, 2021

## OKFB's top bills to watch

**A**fter the state Legislature passed its first major deadline where bills were required to advance out of their committee of origin to remain alive in the legislative process, the total number of proposed bills was reduced from more than 3,000 to only a little more than 1,000.

Below, learn about a few of the remaining bills on Oklahoma Farm Bureau's watch list. For the full list of the bills OKFB is keeping an eye on, visit [okfb.news/billstowatch1](http://okfb.news/billstowatch1).

### **HB 2092 by Rep. Lonnie Sims and SB 189 by Sen. Dave Rader**

House Bill 2092 and Senate Bill 189 would allow counties to create hazard mitigation assessment districts upon approval from 60% of voters. Counties could assess up to an additional 2 mills on land within the county boundaries to pay for a variety of items including administrative costs, hazard mitigation capital improvements, securing matching funds from state and federal government, and public health hazard mitigation plans.

**OKFB comment:** OKFB is strongly opposed. An action alert requesting OKFB members contact legislators and ask for a no vote has been issued. As currently written, urban majorities could pass a property tax increase on all rural landowners. An alternate proposal would exempt agriculture land, but would create zoning regulations for unincorporated areas.

**OKFB policy:** "We oppose increases in ad valorem taxes, but if any additional revenues are needed, we would favor use of sales or income taxes which have a broader usage base."

### **SB 838 by Sen. Darrell Weaver**

When looking at Senate Bill 838, it would allow municipalities to create

public safety protection districts upon approval from 60% of voters. Municipalities could then assess up to an additional 5 mills on eligible property to fund and maintain safety equipment and vehicles as well as pay salaries and benefits to employees in law enforcement and fire protection.

**OKFB comment:** Negotiations are ongoing. The current proposal would only apply within municipal boundaries and contains exemptions for agriculture-zoned land and livestock. OKFB is working toward an additional exemption for equipment, trailers and farm machinery.

**OKFB policy:** We oppose any increase to rural ad valorem taxes by any municipality. We oppose municipalities being granted the authority to levy ad valorem taxes. If the legislature does grant this authority, the following should be included in the law: *Municipalities that offer no municipal services cannot levy a tax. A new ad valorem tax must be approved by a two-thirds (2/3) vote. Increases in ad valorem taxes must require a two-thirds (2/3) vote of all affected property owners. A maximum*

*rate of three (3) mills. No ad valorem taxes may be used to pay wages. A sunset provision of not less than three (3) years on the ad valorem tax. If any portion of this law is deemed to be unconstitutional, the entire statute shall become null and void.*

### **HB 2089 by Speaker of the House Charles McCall**

Speaker of the House Charles McCall hopes to create a tax credit for doctors graduating from a college of medicine or osteopathic medicine in Oklahoma or have completed residency in Oklahoma and who then live and practice in a rural area or a tribally owned or operated health facility.

**OKFB comment:** OKFB strongly supports. This proposal has been introduced in previous years, but never achieved final passage.

**OKFB policy:** "We support programs and legislation that will encourage medical doctors to establish practices in rural Oklahoma."

### **HB 2779 by Rep. John Pfeiffer**

Concerning rural broadband, House Bill 2779 would set limits on how

**Continued on next page.**



## OKFB's top bills to watch *continued*

much rural electric cooperatives can charge communication service providers for pole attachments. It also sets further requirements for pole attachment relocation and television or video services and restricts higher attachment rates than what other attachments with the same utility are charged.

**OKFB comment:** A work-in-progress, as many groups collaborate to seek the proper balance between electric cooperative financing and rural broadband accessibility.”

**OKFB policy:** “We support efforts to improve service to underserved populations in the state, including utility service providers providing broadband to their members/ customers. We support allowing electric cooperatives to use their existing easements and broadband infrastructure without compensation to landowners, solely for the purpose of providing broadband service, if the landowners’ use of easements is unaffected and no other damages or loss of property values are incurred. Cooperatives may extend broadband through their cooperatives or through partnerships with telephone cooperatives or other internet providers.”

Please note, details regarding the bills mentioned above are current as of our print date. For the latest details regarding this session, visit us on Facebook, Twitter or check out our website at [okfarmbureau.org](http://okfarmbureau.org).

### *Did you receive Oklahoma Farm Bureau's first action alert for 2021?*

Oklahoma Farm Bureau members have the ability to quickly and easily advocate for agriculture and rural Oklahoma right from the farm or ranch by signing up to receive legislative action alerts.

Visit [okfarmbureau.org/actioncenter](http://okfarmbureau.org/actioncenter) to sign up today and ensure you receive the latest calls to action this session.

## OKFB WLC provides products to legislators during Farm City Festival

**T**he Oklahoma Farm Bureau Women’s Leadership Committee shared the work of farmers and ranchers with state legislators during its annual Farm City Festival March 3.

The committee members delivered bags filled with Oklahoma-made products to help thank lawmakers for their work and remind them of the important role agriculture has in our state for many citizens.

“The committee really enjoys being able to go to the state Capitol and interact with the people who are

representing everyone in Oklahoma including farmers, ranchers and rural citizens,” said Mignon Bolay, WLC chair. “We are grateful that we had the opportunity to thank the legislators for all they do for farmers, ranchers and rural Oklahoma.”

The bags included beef jerky, pecans, honey, pancake mix, bread, peanuts, goat soap, a pencil, a flashlight and a cookie.

County committees helped donate money to purchase the products for one of WLC’s most popular events.



District three WLC member Karen Krehbiel Dodson delivers a bag filled with Oklahoma products to Rep. Judd Strom during Farm City Festival.



Kirby Smith with the Lt. Governor’s office accepts several bags from District one WLC member Robin Bryant March 3.



## County directories now available

**T**he 2021 Oklahoma Farm Bureau directory is now final and will be distributed to county offices in the coming weeks. For any questions, please contact your field representative.

# Seven things to learn about Oklahoma's redistricting process from Sen. Paxton and Rep. Martinez

**O**klahoma Farm Bureau this week hosted Senate and House redistricting committee chairs Sen. Lonnie Paxton and Rep. Ryan Martinez to discuss Oklahoma's ongoing redistricting process.

Every 10 years, the state Legislature is tasked with redrawing state legislative and congressional district lines following the decennial census. The new boundaries will be used for elections beginning in 2022 through 2030.

Below, read about seven things we learned while visiting with Sen. Paxton and Rep. Martinez.

## 1. Every legislator is involved in the process

Just like standing legislative committees, the House and the Senate each created redistricting committees to carry out the process of redrawing legislative and congressional district lines. Sen. Paxton was appointed chair of the Senate Select Committee on Redistricting by Senate President Pro Tempore Greg Treat and Rep. Martinez was appointed chair of the House State and Federal Redistricting Committee by Speaker of the House Charles McCall.

All 101 state representatives serve on the House redistricting committee, organized by geographical area. State senators each have the opportunity to share their input on their respective district and area with the Senate's redistricting committee.

## 2. House and Senate are working cooperatively

This year, both chambers of the state Legislature are working cooperatively to carry out the process. Ten years ago, Paxton said the House and Senate used separate software systems to draw district lines which created challenges. Today, the chambers are sharing information collected from town halls and are using the same software.

"Everything we're doing is done as a team," Paxton said. "It's been a very collaborative effort, so it increases our transparency and increases the ability for us to work to make the whole process end in a way that's going to be better for the entire state."

## 3. Delays from federal government will push deadline

The state Legislature was scheduled to receive the final 2020 Census data for redistricting in January, but now are not expected to receive final data until September because of federal government delays. However, the Oklahoma Constitution requires legislators to complete the redistricting process within 90 legislative days after the convening of the first regular legislative session following each decennial census.

The delay has forced the state Legislature to proceed using the U.S. Census Bureau estimated data to draw legislative districts. They will finish state legislative districts during the current legislative session and then will work on the state's congressional districts in a special legislative session once the final data is delivered this fall.

"(The estimated data is) accurate," Martinez said. "It's the most updated data that we have, so we're going to move forward and draw lines with that data. And I feel very confident in that process."

If the final 2020 Census data causes the new districts to have a greater variance than the 2.5% that the state Legislature's redistricting rules require, legislators will make adjustments in the special session this fall.

"When we get the final data in later this fall, we'll use that to go back in, look and see if we're still within our variances of where we need to be," Paxton said. "(The process) will be over probably sometime later this fall because of the delays from the federal government. There's nothing we can do about that, so we're going to do what our constitution says and deal with the data that we have."

## 4. Oklahomans are encouraged to participate

Both Paxton and Martinez repeatedly emphasized the goal of including all Oklahomans in the redistricting process. The legislators and their committees spent the last several months gathering input from constituents at 20 town halls held in person and virtually cross the state.

"This process is the people of Oklahoma's process," Martinez said. "These districts belong to the people of Oklahoma."

Oklahomans who are interested in providing input in the process are encouraged to submit a map or contact their state representative and state senator.

"Talk to your local senator, your local house rep," Paxton said. "That's where you can get those individual ideas for your individual district and your area."

## 5. New districts are approved like legislation

Once the lines are drawn, the new districts must pass through the House and Senate redistricting committees just like a piece of legislation. After committee, the districts are required to be passed off the House and Senate floors and signed by the governor.

"So we all have to agree," Paxton said.

## 6. Rural districts will see changes

During the discussion, Paxton and Martinez acknowledged population shifts over the last 10 years could cause some currently rural districts to include more suburban areas of Oklahoma.

"That rural representation question is a big question, but it is simply a numbers game as far as where these districts end up," Paxton said. "Each district has to have relatively that same number of people, and we have to keep finding more population to fill those districts that have either stagnated or have actually lost population over the last 10 years."

## 7. The state legislature still values rural Oklahoma

Though rural districts may see some change, Martinez said he believes the state Legislature still understands the value of rural Oklahoma.

"It's not all doom and gloom," Martinez said. "I do think that people in the Legislature are very much aware of the rural heritage of Oklahoma, and nobody wants to get rid of that. I get the rural heritage and the culture and the roots of our state, and that plays a very important role in Oklahoma regardless of where you're from or where you represent."

**PUBLISHED BY  
OKLAHOMA FARM BUREAU**

**Postmaster:**

Send address corrections to:

*Perspective*  
P.O. Box 53332,  
Oklahoma City, OK 73152-3332

**STAFF DIRECTORY**

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Thad Doye  
(405) 523-2438

**VICE PRESIDENT OF COMMUNICATIONS  
AND PUBLIC RELATIONS**

Dustin Mielke  
(405) 530-2640

**DIRECTOR OF MEDIA RELATIONS**

Hannah Davis  
(405) 523-2346

**PUBLICATIONS SPECIALIST**

Brianne Schwabauer  
(405) 523-2325

**COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST**

Rebekah Nash  
(405) 523-2457

Oklahoma Farm Bureau  
2501 N. Stiles  
Oklahoma City, OK 73105-3126

Non-Profit  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Permit No. 131  
Okla. City, OK.

## Ottawa County members honored with Oklahoma Leopold Conservation Award

**G**rant and Donna Victor, along with their three sons, were recently selected as the recipients of the 2020 Oklahoma Leopold Conservation Award for their conservation efforts at Victor Ranch in Afton.

Given in honor of renowned conservationist Aldo Leopold, the prestigious award recognizes farmers, ranchers and forestland owners who

inspire others with their dedication to land, water and wildlife habitat resources in their care.

“The Oklahoma Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture is proud to help recognize the outstanding conservation efforts of Grant and Donna Victor and Victor Ranch,” said OKFB Foundation for Agriculture President David VonTungeln. “By utilizing production practices including rotational grazing, cover crops, no-till and others, the Victors are a shining example of Oklahoma agricultural producers who wisely steward the natural resources under their care.”

For their efforts, the Victor family was presented with \$10,000 and a crystal award.



For more information about the Victor family and the Sand County Foundation, visit [okfb.news/VictorRanch](http://okfb.news/VictorRanch).

## OKFB Community Food Assistance Matching Program available until March 31

**O**klahoma Farm Bureau’s Community Food Assistance Matching Program is still available for county Farm Bureau’s to participate in.

This program encourages county organizations to donate to a local food assistance program, and OKFB will match the donation up to \$100. OKFB will send a separate check to the chosen program.

Counties are asked to inform their field representative before presenting the food or money. Donations must be made by **March 31** and submit the form no later than **April 9** to receive OKFB’s match.

The Community Food Assistance Matching Program reimbursement form can be found at [okfarmbureau.org/applications](http://okfarmbureau.org/applications).

For more information or questions, contact Melisa Neal at (405) 523-2475.