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Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick Names Senate Select Committee on Mass Violence Prevention and Community Safety and Issues Committee Charges

AUSTIN - Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick announced the members of the Senate Select Committee on Mass Violence Prevention and Community Safety today and charged the bipartisan committee to study a series of issues in response to the recent mass shootings in El Paso and Midland/Odessa as well as previous mass shootings in Santa Fe, Sutherland Springs and Dallas. The members represent a wide geography and several have suffered mass shootings in their district.

Senator Joan Huffman, R-Houston, will serve as chair of the committee. Senator Judith Zaffirini, D-Laredo, will serve as vice chair. Members include: Sen. Donna Campbell, R-New Braunfels, Sen. Kelly Hancock, R-North Richland Hills, Sen. Jane Nelson, R-Flower Mound, Sen. Charles Perry, R-Lubbock, Sen. Jose Rodriguez, D-El Paso, Sen. Larry Taylor, R-Friendswood, and Sen. John Whitmire, D-Houston.

Lt. Gov. Patrick gave the select committee the following charges:

- Learn firsthand, the personal, family, and community impact of mass shootings in Texas by hearing from victims of mass violence in Dallas, Santa Fe, Sutherland Springs, El Paso, and Midland/Odessa. Conduct hearings in Austin, El Paso, and the Midland/Odessa area to meet with victims and their families in those communities.
- Examine ways to keep firearms out of the hands of individuals who would not pass a federal background check, while protecting the Second Amendment and Texans' right to bear arms. Examine whether stranger-to-stranger gun sales in Texas should be subject to background checks.
- Consider the role digital media, dark web networks, and overall cultural issues play in the promotion of mass violence and how these contribute to the radicalization of individuals and incitement of racism, white supremacy and domestic terrorism. Research the link between violent video games and recent mass shootings in Texas and examine the impact of the overall fraying culture on mass shootings, including increased violence, tolerance for violence, and extremist views in our society.

- Assess how state and local law enforcement agencies, fusion centers, mental health providers, digital platforms and social media companies such as Google, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc., can better collaborate to detect, prevent, and respond to mass violence and terroristic activity. Examine what resources, staffing and protocols are necessary to enhance these partnerships and whether state funding is needed to assist local authorities in this endeavor.
- Determine the effectiveness of current laws that are used for timely reporting of criminal history information, emergency protective orders, and other threat indicators to keep firearms out of the hands of individuals who would not pass a federal firearms background check. Review workforce and resource challenges impeding current laws and identify accountability measures needed for law enforcement, courts, firearm distributors, and private sellers who fail to follow reporting requirements under current law.

The committee will begin meeting later this month.

Patrick added that Sen. Huffman is “uniquely qualified to head the Senate Select Committee on Mass Violence Prevention and Community Safety.” Huffman began her career as a prosecutor in Harris County where she served as Chief Felony Prosecutor, Special Crimes Gang Prosecutor, and Legal Counsel to the Organized Crime Narcotics Task Force. She served as lead prosecutor in over 100 jury trials, including murders and sexual assaults of adults and children. She was twice elected State District Judge of the 183rd Criminal District Court in Harris County.

Senator Huffman has a solid pro-Second Amendment record. As chair of the Senate’s State Affairs Committee, which handles Second Amendment issues, she has played a key role in passing priority gun legislation over the last several sessions. In 2019, she led the charge on Senate Bill 666 to allow law enforcement to prohibit individuals convicted of domestic violence from purchasing a firearm. It would have required all courts to report Class C Misdemeanor and domestic violence convictions to the Texas Department of Public Safety who submits that information to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS). Unfortunately, SB 666 did not ultimately make it to Gov. Abbott’s desk.

Senator Bryan Hughes, R-Mineola, will assume the chairmanship of the Senate State Affairs Committee beginning October 1. Senator Huffman will continue in her role as chair of the Senate Redistricting Committee.

Senator Huffman will coordinate select committee hearings with the House Select Committee on Mass Violence Prevention and Community Safety Chairman.

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