



February 22, 2021

WINTER STORM RECOVERY

My colleagues and I on the Senate Business and Commerce Committee will meet this week to start the process of identifying what needs to be done to ensure Texans never again experience the disruption in electricity service, internet service, and access to clean water that too many experienced last week as a result of the winter storm. Accountability is critical, but my first commitment is to making sure that people are taken care of and community service is provided.

ELECTRICITY PAYMENT AND RATES

I am very concerned about the stories I have heard about dramatic energy price increases that people are experiencing on their bills already. Some companies have recognized the billing errors and are correcting these issues. Many people will begin receiving their utility bills in early to mid-March, so you may not know if your bill will be incorrect or worse, have exorbitant charges.

The PUC released an [FAQ](#) explaining that because most residential electricity customers are on fixed-price contracts with their power providers, they are not exposed to dramatic changes in their rates due to scarcity-driven changes in the wholesale price of electricity. The PUC encourages customers to look at their next bill closely to ensure accurate billing. If you have a dispute, first call your provider to work towards a solution. If your problem is unresolved, [file a complaint](#) with the PUC.

Additionally, on Sunday, the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) issued an [emergency order](#) to temporarily prevent disconnections for non-payment.

FILING AN INSURANCE CLAIM

Contact your insurance agent or company as soon as you can to report damage resulting from a storm. [Click here](#) for tips on filing a claim.

POST-DISASTER SCAMS

Unfortunately, unscrupulous individuals take advantage of people in desperate situations. Beware of door-to-door contractors, fly-by-night charities, unsolicited calls and emails from utility companies seeking personal information, and other potential scams. [Click here](#) to learn more about post-disaster scams and contractors.

Also, price gouging is illegal. During a natural disaster, state laws are triggered that provide additional enforcement to protect consumers. Texans who believe they have encountered price gouging on lodging, food, water, gasoline, medicine, or other resources / supplies as a result of last week's winter storm should call the Office of the Attorney General's toll-free complaint line at (800) 621-0508 or [file a complaint online](#).

FEDERAL ASSISTANCE

Texas received a partial approval from for the federal government for disaster assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) over the weekend. FEMA may grant individuals that do not have private insurance assistance for damages. Individuals will have to self-report damages to FEMA using the [online form](#).

LEGISLATIVE ACTION THIS WEEK

The [Senate Business and Commerce Committee](#), on which I serve, will hold a committee hearing on [February 25](#) with ERCOT, the Texas Public Utilities Commission (PUC), and electricity providers. The committee has already sent questions in writing to the state agencies to investigate the outages, and I have heard from a number of you about additional questions and concerns that we all share.