

NEWS

Company behind East Texas water grab hired key lobbyists just before bill delaying it died

By **Megan Kimble**, *Austin Bureau*

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The Trinity River flows through Palestine, Texas on Thursday, July 31, 2025. The river flows to Trinity Bay, on the border of Harris County.

Elizabeth Conley/Houston Chronicle

The Texas Senate voted against delaying a [controversial East Texas groundwater export project](#) on the same day the company behind it hired one of Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick's top advisors as a lobbyist.

Conservation Equity Management, a company affiliated with Dallas investor Kyle Bass, hired Allen Blakemore on Tuesday, the same day the legislation hit the Senate floor, according to [lobbying records filed at the Texas Ethics Commission](#). Blakemore is [Patrick's political consultant](#) and has also worked on the campaigns of several Republican senators.

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The Senate, which Patrick oversees, ultimately agreed to back a state-led study of the company's proposal to pump huge amounts of groundwater out from under

Anderson and Henderson counties. But it stripped a provision that would have put the project on hold until the findings came out in 2027.

The change “gutted the most important part of this bill,” according to the author, state Rep. Cody Harris, whose district includes the counties Bass is looking to tap. The legislation ultimately died on Wednesday night when the special session ended, in a win for Bass.

Blakemore directed questions to Bass, whose spokesperson did not respond to a request for comment. Patrick said in a statement that he was “not involved in it at any level.”

He said the senator who sponsored the bill and the one who chaired the committee that vetted it made all the decisions.

“I told them we would do whatever they decided – it was up to them,” Patrick said.

Two companies affiliated with Bass have applied for exploratory permits for wells capable of pumping more groundwater out from under the two counties than is currently available.

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The companies have not yet applied for permits to export the water, but Bass signaled that is his intention, saying that the water was needed to address looming shortages elsewhere and could go “anywhere south of Waco and... north of Dallas-Fort Worth.” The permit decision now rests with the State Office of Administrative Hearings.

Harris, a Republican from Palestine, [filed House Bill 27 in response to local backlash](#). The bill would have required the Texas Water Development Board to study the effects of groundwater pumping in the aquifers below Anderson and Henderson counties and present it to state leaders. In the meantime, the groundwater conservation district would not be able to issue a new production or export permit for the region.

Water experts have said that diverting water from the area's Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer could impact downstream users of surface water – like the City of Houston – because the aquifer helps replenish rivers and streams.

Shortly after HB 27 was filed, [Bass lashed out at Harris](#) and threatened to sue him in a since-deleted post on X. “Small time Texas politician convincing the Governor... to allow an East Texas groundwater permit application to be delayed two years creates an immediate Federal Takings case,” he wrote in August. “See you in Federal Court @CodyHarrisTX.”

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While the legislation easily cleared the House, state Sen. Robert Nichols, a Republican from Jacksonville and the bill's sponsor in the Senate, said the moratorium was removed because it was the only way to get the legislation out of committee and through the upper chamber.

During a committee hearing on Tuesday, several Republicans pushed back against the proposed moratorium, saying it set a dangerous precedent.

“At this point, how do we say that we're going to put a moratorium in just those two counties or that groundwater district and not everywhere else in the state?” said state Sen. Paul Bettencourt, a Houston Republican.

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Records show Blakemore is one of several lobbyists Bass' company brought on in the waning days of the special session.

Two employees of Blakemore Public Affairs are also listed as lobbyists for the company: Avery Dishaw, a former staffer for Bettencourt, and Casey Haney. David Whitley, the former Secretary of State and deputy chief of staff to Gov. Greg Abbott, also lists Conservation Equity Management as a client, as of August 27.

According to the ethics commission records, Blakemore would be paid between \$56,000 and \$111,000 for work between September 2 and December 31, 2025.

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