



Capitol Update (1-9-19)

On January 8th, 2019 the 86th Texas Legislature gavelled in and I began my fifth session serving the citizens of Senate District 22. As you know, the Texas Legislature meets every other year for 140 days to file bills, debate policies and enact laws on behalf of the people of Texas. Serving in the Texas Senate remains the great privilege of my life, one I don't take for granted.

In the 18 months since the conclusion of the 85th legislative session, my team and I have been busy. Just as I do after each session, I spent several months traveling Senate District 22 and meeting with constituents to discuss both the outcomes of the session and provide updates on activities directly impacting their respective communities. In addition to district visits, this interim has been unique. More so than in any of my previous interims, my post-session schedule was full of legislative activities associated with special committees and task forces to which I have been appointed.

This Capitol Update will cover a number of items on which I want to update you, as well as some resources and alerts for the session. Look for more updates approximately every two weeks throughout the session. Thank you to all the constituents who stopped by my office yesterday during the opening day, and if you plan to visit the Texas Capitol for inauguration day, please feel free to stop by our office—my team and I are still located in office E1.706 in the Capitol Extension.



I enjoyed having constituents from Navarro County down in Austin for opening day of session. On the far left is Eric Meyer then Bobby Vickery. Far right is Dr. Kevin Fegan, President of Navarro College, with members of his team.

Committees

This interim I had the honor of chairing three committees. I retained the chairmanship of the Senate Committee on Nominations while also being appointed by Lt. Governor Patrick as Chairman of the Sunset Advisory Commission as well as Chairman of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Economic Development. With these new appointments, I expect to relinquish the Chairmanship of the Senate Committee on Nominations for the 86th Legislative Session pending the Lt Governor's announcement of the committee structures. My role as chairman of Sunset Advisory Commission will continue through the end of the legislative session, and me and my team will help to shepherd 27 pieces of legislation through the process.

- **Sunset Advisory Commission**

One of my main legislative responsibilities this interim has been as Chairman of the Sunset Advisory Commission, which is the regular assessment of the continuing need for a state agency or program to exist. While standard legislative oversight is concerned with agency compliance with legislative policies, Sunset starts with a more basic question: Do the agency's functions continue to be needed? The Sunset Advisory Commission reviewed 32 state agencies. Our meetings began in March, and our last meeting was today, Jan. 9th. Currently, my office, in conjunction with Sunset staff and Legislative Council, is in the process of drafting the recommendations of the Commission into bills which will be filed in the next few weeks. Some of the most prominent agencies being reviewed this cycle include the Texas Department of Public Safety, Texas Alcohol and Beverage Commission, and Texas Department of Motor Vehicles.

- **Natural Resources and Economic Development**

Another committee that has been a strong focus of mine this interim is the Natural Resources and Economic Development Committee. This is a standing committee in the Texas Senate and is responsible for holding hearings and reviewing legislation relevant to oil and gas, environmental permitting and quality, workforce development, labor, and tools and programs authorized by the legislature to encourage economic development at the state and local level. Lt. Governor Dan Patrick appointed me chairman in March, and since then I have spent several months delving deeper into the areas that fall under the purview of the committee. I have had the opportunity to meet with leaders from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Texas Railroad Commission, Texas Workforce Commission, as well as citizens and businesses impacted by the actions of this committee. I learned a great deal from these meetings, and I look forward to a productive session working on issues like economic development reform, expedited permitting reform, and protecting Texas from over-regulation from the Federal government.

- **Nominations**

This past interim, the Governor made several high profile appointments that will need to be confirmed by the Senate this session. Some of these include: Commissioner of the Department of Family and Protective Services, Commissioner of Insurance, Executive Commissioner of Health and Human Services, Public Utility Commission of Texas, Secretary of State, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, and the Texas Water Development Board. These are just to name a few. The Governor made a total of 393 appointments this past interim. Many more appointments will be made, during this regular session. I look forward to working one on one with the new Chairman to ensure a smooth transition.



Members of The Sunset Advisory Commission taking final votes at our last hearing on Jan. 9, 2019.

Staff Announcements

“Your subordinates’ success is your success”—that’s one of my favorite military maxims, as the success of my staff in their positions helps to make me a better servant to you. Therefore, I never go into a legislative session without properly assembling and preparing a staff to help me serve the citizens of Senate District 22. We have a few familiar faces on "Team Birdwell," but we also have some new staff members who have replaced fine members of my previous staff who have moved on to other opportunities. Back in August, I announced the promotion of my longtime Legislative Director Anna Barnett to Chief of Staff. Anna will lead all three of our offices and my new Legislative Director, Tabatha Vasquez, will run all policy operations in my Capitol office. Additionally, our highly-skilled team includes:

- Senior Policy Analyst Jarred Shaffer
- Policy Analyst Katrina Smith
- Policy Analyst Gatlin Moncla
- Office Manager & Scheduler Wynn Baker
- Constituent Correspondence Manager Brianna Weber
- Bullock Scholar Daniel Burch (*Junior, Baylor University*)
- Intern Tori Villarreal (*Senior, University of Texas at Austin*)
- District Manager Suzy DeArmond (*Granbury Office*)
- District Manager Shelly Verlander (*Waco Office*)

Along with my Capitol Office and District Office staff, I also have a highly qualified committee staff over in the Natural Resources and Economic Development Office. That staff includes:

- Committee Director Tucker Royall
- Senior Policy Analyst Chris Noonan
- Policy Analyst and Clerk Paige McGhee

Key Dates for the 85th Legislative Session

Here are a few of the key legislative dates of which I want to make you aware:

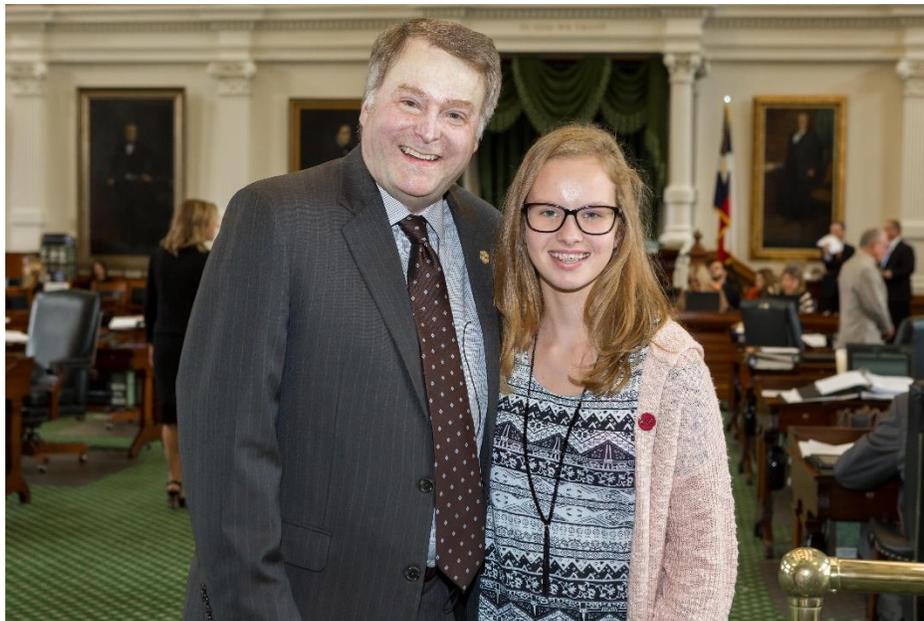
- Mid-January—Senate rules to be determined by the body; Committee assignments to be designated by Lt. Governor Dan Patrick.
- March 8, 2019 (60th day)—With the exception of "local bills," all legislation must be filed with the Calendar Clerk in the office of the Secretary of the Senate. Unless the Governor declares emergency legislative items, this is the first day the Legislature may vote on filed legislation without a vote of 4/5 of the House or Senate.
- May 27, 2019 (140th day)—The final day of the 85th regular session, also known as “sine die”. The final weeks—and particularly days—of the session are nearly non-stop; this date is Memorial Day, and the Senate will be working as we have in previous sessions.
- June 16, 2019—This is the 20th day following adjournment and the last day the governor can sign or veto bills passed during the regular legislative session.
- August 26, 2019—This is the 91st day following adjournment and the date that bills without specific effective dates become law.

Resources for the 86th Legislative Session

As always, I encourage you to check in on what's happening day to day at the Capitol. The official website of the Texas Legislature (www.capitol.state.tx.us) is a great resource for legislative information during the session. You can watch live video coverage of the chambers or committees—and even archived footage—for both the [House](#) and [Senate](#); you can track specific [pieces of legislation](#); and you can find a bevy of other information on the [FAQ page](#). If social media is your preferred method for following Capitol activity, be sure to follow the hashtag #txlege, which is widely used by legislators, media outlets and citizens alike. Additionally, my staff and I both update my Facebook and Twitter accounts regularly.

Senate Page Opportunities

The Honorary Page Program in the Texas Senate is an exciting opportunity providing insight into lawmaking procedures for Texans 6-18 years of age. The duties of Honorary Page often include working on the Senate Floor during a legislative session day, communicating with senior Senate staff members, making deliveries to Senate offices, and assisting with assignments from Senate offices. Any parents or guardians interested in this opportunity may contact my Office Manager, Wynn Baker, at wynn.baker@senate.texas.gov.



Elizabeth Lewis served as an Honorary Page for Senator Birdwell in 2017.

I hope you found the information above to be useful. Communicating with constituents is one of my top priorities, so I will appreciate you contacting any of my offices in order to make certain my staff and I know how we may best serve you. In that same vein, I hope you will consider forwarding this Capitol Update to your family, friends in colleagues [residing in Senate District 22](#). If you know someone who would like to receive future editions of our Capitol Update, please visit [my official website to subscribe!](#)

My colleagues and I have a great deal of work ahead of us, but it's important for you to know that I see each day as an opportunity to make sure I am casting votes based upon the principles and policies for which I told you I would fight. I appreciate the privilege to represent the citizens of Senate District 22, and it remains my distinct honor to serve each of you in this capacity.

Happy New Year and God Bless,

Brian Birdwell
State Senator, District 22

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