



## **Capitol Update (1-24-19)**

Greetings from your Texas Capitol! Last week, I was honored to attend the inauguration of Governor Greg Abbott and Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick. They both spoke about their vision for what the priorities are for the 86th Legislative Session regarding school finance, limiting the growth of property taxes, and better compensation for teachers. I agree with these vision statements and look forward to evaluating the proposed legislation that comes through the committees and to the Senate floor. Let's dive right into this edition of the update.



*I'm pictured here with my Senate colleagues at the inauguration of Governor Abbott and Lt. Governor Patrick.*

### **Committee Announcements**

Last week Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick announced Senate committee assignments for the 86th legislative session. I was extremely pleased to continue serving as Chairman of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Economic Development, where I will be honored to lead the eleven-member committee charged with 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. In addition to this role, I am excited about the high volume of critical work ahead of me as a member of two of the most rigorous Senate committees: State Affairs and Finance—the latter of which began the budget-crafting process on Tuesday. As expected, I relinquished the Chairmanship of the Senate Committee on Nominations. I had a very productive meeting with the new Chair, Senator Dawn Buckingham (R - Lakeway), and I know she will continue the good work we did on Nominations for the past two sessions.

One of the key functions of the Lieutenant Governor is appointing senators to serve on a number of standing committees which contemplate all legislation, broken up by subject matter, prior to bills potentially advancing to the Senate floor for a full vote. You can read more about the Senate standing committees here:

<https://senate.texas.gov/committees.php>.

## **Sunset Advisory Commission**

As I told you in my last update, my role as chairman of the Sunset Advisory Commission will continue through the end of the legislative session, and my team and I will shepherd 27 pieces of legislation that were developed during the interim and through the legislative process. This week, in partnership with my House Vice-Chairman Chris Paddie (R - Marshall), we assigned each member of the Sunset Commission the pieces of legislation with which they will be charged with authoring this legislative session. I will be carrying the legislation for the Texas Alcohol and Beverage Commission, Texas Department of Public Safety, Nueces River Authority, Red River Authority, and the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority. I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues to ensure the hard work that we put in during the interim continues throughout session and that each piece of sunset legislation passes to help these agencies run more efficiently and effectively, and ultimately serve Texans better.

## **First Bills Filed**

Thus far, I have filed six pieces of legislation, though I anticipate filing several more in the coming weeks. The bill-filing deadline for both the House and Senate is March 10th. Here's a brief summary of some of my bills:

- **SB 404/408** - *Relating to a petition by residents of certain counties for an election regarding voter approval of municipal annexation/Relating to eliminating distinctions in the application of consent annexation requirements.* During the 85th special session, the legislature passed SB6, which reformed the annexation process in Texas. This long-overdue change gave property owners a deciding voice in the annexation of their property but failed to extend the same opportunities to all Texans, regardless of where they live. Property owners living in less populous counties were provided a mechanism to "opt-in" to these reforms; however, this mechanism has proven arduous and onerous. SB 404 seeks to strengthen property owners ability to utilize this mechanism by suspending a city's pending annexation plans once a petition's signatures are received and verified by the county and an election is held. Separately, my overall objective is to apply SB 6's reforms statewide, removing the need for citizens in counties below the 500,00 threshold to "opt-in." This is why I also filed SB 408, which would resolve the issue altogether by removing the "tier" designations from statute and, providing property owners in all counties, regardless of population size, the same protections against forced annexation.
- **SB 405** - *Relating to the criminal offense of making a false report to a peace officer, federal special investigator, law enforcement employee, corrections officer, or jailer.* When an individual knowingly makes a false report to a law enforcement agent, that individual can face criminal charges. It was recently discovered that no similar penalty exists should an individual knowingly make a false claim to a corrections officer. This legislation would correct that and hold those who make baseless accusations accountable.
- **SB 406** - *Relating to the carrying or storage of a handgun by a school marshal* - Local school districts know best how to protect their students, faculty, and staff. The school marshal plan adopted by many districts allows for trained, authorized individuals to conceal carry on the campuses of that district. These same school districts should be given the authority and autonomy to decide how those individuals must store or carry those concealed handguns while acting as a marshal. This legislation further empowers school districts to create effective school safety plans that prioritize the unique needs and physical layout of their individual districts and campuses.
- **SB 407** - *Relating to the presiding officers of the board of directors of river authorities* - The governor appoints, and the Senate confirms, the members of the governing boards of the many river authorities across the state. Currently, the governor appoints the board chair of 4 those river authorities. On the remaining boards, the members of the boards choose their board chair. This legislation would require the governor to designate the chair of all 17 river authorities, thus creating a more direct link between the governor and the actions of the board as navigated by the chair, and provide for more direct oversight from the office of the governor of all our river authorities.

## **Joint Authored and Co-Authored Bills**

With thousands of bills filed each legislative session, legislators are often unable to carry a particular piece of legislation due to their existing workload. Additionally, a colleague may file a bill with which a member has strong agreement or before that member is able to do so. In either instance, the option exists to "joint author" or "co-author" a particular bill. These terms mean essentially the same thing: a legislator is adding his or her signature to a bill, offering the bill author a seconding voice of support. A summary of some of the bills I have joint authored/co-authored can be found below:

- **SB 31** by Zaffirini (D - Loreda) - This bill would establish a guardianship abuse, fraud, and exploitation deterrence program at the State Office of Court Administration.
- **SB 63** by Nelson (R - Flower Mound) - This legislation establishes a consortium among Texas health related institutions to collaborate on statewide mental health initiatives.
- **SB 205** by Perry (R - Lubbock) - This legislation would help strengthen the relationship between the Secretary of State's office and the Office of the Attorney General in instances where a non-citizen has cast a ballot in an election, allowing for quarterly review and subsequent investigation by the AG's office in such circumstances.

### **Senate Bill 1: The Budget**

As the Senate Finance committee begins the rigorous process of crafting the 2020-2021 budget, some of our main priorities include focusing on our school finance system, evaluating the ballooning cost of healthcare, addressing mental health needs for our most vulnerable citizens, ensuring public safety, providing safe, reliable transportation statewide, and as always, finding ways to fulfill our constitutional responsibilities and state services while seeking out tax relief for hard-working Texans. While initial budget proposals have been submitted by both the House and Senate, the details associated with how we fund the major components of state government will come together in the next two months of our biennial budgetary process. I want to thank my colleague, Senate Finance Committee Chair, Senator Jane Nelson (R - Flower Mound), for working with me throughout this interim to ensure that funding for Texas State Technical College (TSTC) was based on the formula agreement that the legislature made with them two sessions ago. TSTC is funded differently than all other institutions of higher education because they are funded based on outcomes. I am pleased that the base budget recognizes this funding agreement by funding TSTC based on the overwhelming success of students graduating and being employed quickly in the Texas Economy.

### **Capitol Visits from SD-22**

In just the past week alone, my team and I have enjoyed the honor of welcoming numerous constituents and elected officials from Senate District 22 at the Capitol! Citizens from Mansfield, Arlington, Waco, Hillsboro, Navarro County, and Kerens have made the trek to Austin to learn about the legislative process and voice their questions and concerns about Texas public policy. It is always my pleasure to see them and answer their thoughtful questions about the work of the Legislature, and to visit about the direct impact our work will have on them, the citizens we serve.



*Pictured here with Ellis County Judge Todd Little*



*Pictured here with Colt Hoffman from Falls County*

In closing, I want to thank you again for reading this update from 'Team Birdwell.' I hope you found it to be informative and that you'll share it with your friends, family and colleagues in Senate District 22, who may subscribe to the Capitol Update [by clicking here](#).

God Bless,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brian Birdwell".

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