



Capitol Update (2-4-21)

Greetings from your Texas Capitol! As I shared in my email two weeks ago, the Texas Senate Select Committee on Redistricting Committee, of which I am a member, began holding a series of regional hearings to solicit testimony from the public about the upcoming redistricting process. These past two weeks we heard from several regions around the state, including Central Texas and the great Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex. I want to thank my constituents who testified during the hearing; your input is extremely valuable. The committee will continue to have hearings for the next few weeks. The schedule for those hearings can be found [here](#), and if you would like to sign up to testify, please do so here: <https://bit.ly/3sJsSix>.

In addition, there are a few other things I would like to update you on, so let's dive right into this edition of the update.

Committee Announcements

Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick announced Senate committee assignments for the 87th legislative session. I was extremely pleased to continue serving as Chairman of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Economic Development. I was humbled to be appointed as a member of a rigorous slate of committees. A list of those committees, including a brief description of their jurisdiction, is listed below.

Natural Resources & Economic Development, Chairman — The Natural Resources and Economic Development Committee 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.

State Affairs, Vice-Chair — This comprehensive committee deals with legislation affecting Texas state government, including its interaction with state and federal entities. In addition, State Affairs has jurisdiction over topics such as the defense of constitutional rights and the government's proper role and function. Most recently, State Affairs held hearings throughout the interim over the following charges: Human trafficking, taxpayer lobbying, protecting the unborn, the second amendment, and personal property protection.

Higher Education, Member — The Senate Committee on Higher Education handles legislation pertaining to Texas public university systems and community colleges. The committee focuses on providing opportunities for Texans seeking higher education and workforce training (i.e., Texas State Technical College, headquartered in SD 22), helping Texans enter the workforce with much-needed skills. I served on this committee my first session in 2011 and 2013, and I'm looking forward to serving on it again this legislative session.

Criminal Justice, Member — The Criminal Justice Committee reviews bills that deal with state agencies' services and rights for detaining and supervising offenders, law enforcement agencies, and court systems throughout the State of Texas. The Criminal Justice Committee's goal is to review bills about offenders' rehabilitation, preventing other crimes, moral support for victims, and bail reform, which Governor Abbott discussed during his State of the State and made one of his top priorities this legislative session.

Select Committee on Redistricting, Member — The Select Committee on Redistricting has the critical task of redrawing our state's electoral maps based on data from the 2020 United States Census. The legislature is responsible for drawing the United States House of Representative districts, the State House districts, the State Senate districts, and the State Board of Education districts. Simultaneously, local governments will be charged with drawing the local maps based on census numbers. The committee is currently holding regional hearings to receive public input while we wait until the state gets Census data.

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 a strong agreement or before that member can 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.

I have signed on to a slate of bills that Senator Charles Schwertner (R-Georgetown) will file in the upcoming weeks. These bills provide more protections for landowners against Eminent Domain. Once those are filed, I will include more information in my next update.

A summary of some of the other bills I have joint authored/co-authored can be found below:

- **SB 208** by Bettencourt (R - Houston) - This bill prevents rogue county clerks from conducting massive, unsecure mail-in voting campaigns by preventing the distribution of unsolicited mail-in ballot applications.
- **SB 528** by Hughes (R - Mineola) - This bill levels the playing field for small businesses by prohibiting large insurance brokers from using anticompetitive contract provisions designed to prevent smaller pharmacies from providing cost-effective medications.

Texas Public Policy Foundation Policy Orientation

I was honored to speak at the Texas Public Policy Foundation's (TPPF) annual policy orientation. I joined my former Senate Colleague, The Honorable Robert Duncan, along with Mike Berry, General Counsel for the First Liberty Institute, on a panel moderated by Rob Henneke, General Counsel of TPPF, entitled Revisiting Judicial Selection in Texas. During this interim, I served on The Texas Commission on Judicial Selection, which the 86th Texas Legislature created to study and review the method by which judges are selected for office in Texas. The Commission held public hearings and received testimony from organizations. Members discussed and analyzed selection methods from across the board to find what works best for the State of Texas. The Commission submitted their findings to the legislature on December 31, 2020, which can be found [here](#). Throughout the process, I was adamant in my opposition to appointing judges rather than allowing citizens to elect their preferred candidate. Although the issue is extremely complex, there is still no compelling evidence to suggest that the legislature should strip a Texan's right to vote for their preferred judicial candidates. I spoke at length about my stance and some good recommendations from the Commission on this panel. The entirety of the discussion can be viewed on the TPPF Website, Multimedia, "Revisiting Judicial Selection."

In closing, I want to thank you again for reading this update from 'Team Birdwell.' I hope you found it 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,



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