

Capitol Update 3-28-13

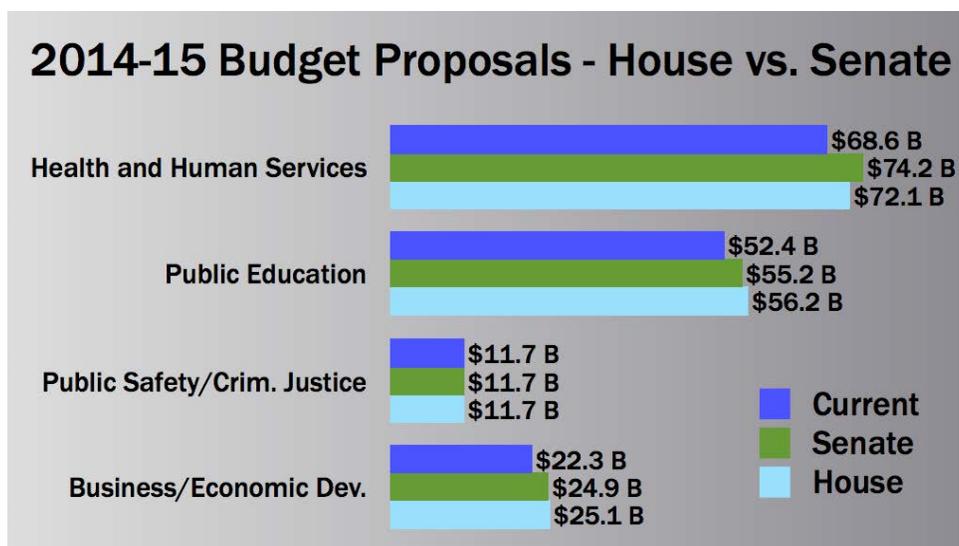
Greetings from your Texas Capitol!

Tomorrow is Good Friday and we're just a few days shy of Easter Sunday. After some time with Mel and Matt this weekend, I will return to Austin for the final 57 days of the legislative session. With that, please allow me to update you on a few key issues.

The Texas Senate Adopts 2014-2015 Budget

Last week I cast my vote in favor of Senate Bill 1, the Senate version of the general appropriations act. I was proud to support this balanced budget, which holds state spending below our projected population and inflation growth, and moreover, moves us one step closer to truth in budgeting. SB 1 efficiently funds our public education system, supports the healthcare needs of our state's most vulnerable, and sustains priorities for every Texan—all while maintaining our commitment to not raise taxes.

This week, the House Committee on Appropriations amended and approved SB 1. The committee made little or no adjustment to the Senate-proposed funding for two sections of the budget—Article V (Public Safety & Criminal Justice) or Article VII (Business & Economic Development). The main differences in the two budgets come from the \$2.1 billion House decrease in Article II (Health & Human Services) and the \$1 billion House increase in Article III (Education). The chart below highlights the differences between our current budget, the Senate-proposed budget and the House-proposed budget. The budget articles included below—Articles II, III, V and VII—make up more than 90 percent of Texas' budget.



Source: *The Texas Tribune*, 3/27/13 (Todd Wiseman)

If passed by the full House next Thursday, SB 1 will then move to conference committee. The conference committee is made up of members of the Senate and the House as appointed by the Lieutenant Governor and the Speaker, respectively. Working under a strict set of parliamentary rules, the committee members will eventually produce a final budget to be approved by the legislature. Separate from the general appropriations bill, the legislature is still working toward funding our state's rapidly-growing need for water and transportation infrastructure expansion.

Term Limits

One of the pieces of legislation that attracted much attention last week was Senate Joint Resolution 13 by Senator Kevin Eltife (R-Tyler) which puts before the citizens a Texas Constitutional amendment that reads:

"...limiting to two the number of consecutive terms for which a person may be elected or appointed to hold the office of governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, comptroller of public accounts, commissioner of the General Land Office, attorney general, commissioner of agriculture, or railroad commissioner."

As I shared with one of our district newspapers, I voted against SJR 13 based on the firm belief that elected officials are, by nature of the ballot box, term-limited already. Founding Father Thomas Jefferson urged that

we always endeavor not to take power from citizens, and as such, I do not believe it is appropriate for the Legislature to remove authority from the hands of citizens who might exercise their opinions by voting for the candidate of their choice. Furthermore, I believe it would be inappropriate for me to have supported term limits and restrictions for the executive branch of state government but not the legislative or judicial branches. If passed by a two-thirds margin in the House, SJR 13 will be on the November ballot.

Update on Priority Legislation

Though most legislation will be debated after Easter, the Senate has already passed 185 bills. Among those, I wanted to bring a few key authored, joint-authored (JA) or co-authored (CA) bills to your attention.

- **SCR 6 (CA)**—Urging Congress to reimburse the State of Texas for bearing the financial burden of the federal government's responsibility to secure the Texas-Mexico border during the 2012-13 budget cycle.
- **SB 135 (CA)**—Abolishes the mandate to school-districts that a student's end-of-course assessment performance account for 15% of their final grade.
- **SB 441**—Establishes “Fast Start” programs for technical and workforce education, affording students with prior education or experience to earn certifications or degrees as quickly as they can master the skills.
- **SB 448 (CA)**—Requires a financial and performance audit of the Lower Colorado and Brazos River Authorities, among others.
- **SB 515 (JA)**—Allows a Texas brewpub to distribute product beyond their brick-and-mortar facility, thus creating an opportunity for their small business to grow.
- **SB 518 (JA)**—Removes anti-competitive restrictions on craft brewers by allowing them to sell product to consumers on-site.
- **SB 655**—Ensures that all portions of Texas law dealing with eminent domain clearly state that such authority can only be exercised for public use—not public purpose.

For more detail on SB 441 and SB 655, please refer to a previous Capitol Update by [clicking here](#).



Brian & Robert Griffin III in the Senate Chamber

Baylor Legend Visits the Texas Capitol

It's always a pleasure to recognize citizens from the district when they're visiting the Texas Capitol, but it was especially exciting to honor 2012 Heisman Trophy-winner and NFL rookie standout Robert Griffin III—or RG3, as he's known to many. Robert won his Heisman during the interim (the non-legislative session year), and as such we were just recently able to honor his successes. Beyond recognizing his accomplishments with the Baylor Bears and Washington Redskins, several senators made sure to praise Robert for his character *off* the field. He has been, as I said on the floor, the type of athlete we want our young men and women to emulate. The NFL rookie visited the House of Representatives, met with Governor Perry, and even had a Baylor University scholarship announced in his name. There was also [a great story](#) in the Austin newspaper about Robert's visit. It really was a special day, and we thank the Griffin family for joining us.

As always, I encourage you to check out live video coverage of the [House](#) and [Senate](#) and to track legislative activity on the [Texas Legislature Online \(TLO\)](#) website. Until the next Update, I want to wish each of you a safe and Happy Easter from my family to yours.

God Bless,

Brian Birdwell
State Senator, District 22