



Capitol Update 4-30-13

Greetings from your Texas Capitol!

We're down to less than 30 days left in the regular session, and as you no doubt can imagine, the pace has increased dramatically. Several impactful pieces of legislation have passed the Senate in the last few weeks, and more is yet to come. Beyond my regular legislative duties, however, my focus and that of my staff has been directed almost exclusively to the City of West. As we near the completion of the session and things only get busier, Mel and I would ask that you continue to keep the people of West in your prayers.

Tragedy in West

In response to the recent tragedy in West, I want to again voice support for the affected families and gratitude for all those involved in the recovery process. I was so humbled to be able to spend a couple of days recently with our local officials and first responders who have done a masterful job of handling this tragic situation. This community has a great deal of work ahead of it, but I have absolutely no doubt that the citizens of West will continue to pull together—as Texans always do—and get their town back on track.

In the meantime, it is imperative that we all continue to provide them with our prayers and our support. Representative Kyle Kacal and I have spent the last 10 days in meetings with local officials from McLennan County, the City of West and West ISD. As we continue to gather information, Rep. Kacal and I are communicating with the Offices of the Governor, Lt. Governor, Speaker, and the respective House and Senate budget chairmen to determine how we can swiftly and efficiently provide West with necessary support.

In addition, I would encourage those that are interested in helping to focus on giving monetary donations as the community has received a surplus of supplies. For information on how to make a **financial donation**, please visit www.pointwestbank.com. For **volunteer opportunities** and an extensive list of information on how you can help the people of West, please visit www.withwest.com.

Addressing Texas' Infrastructure Needs – SJR 1

Last week the Senate united on a plan to leave more than \$6 billion in reserve in the Texas Economic Stabilization Fund, better known as the “rainy day fund,” empowering Texas voters to consider a one-time infusion of \$5.7 billion into the critical water and transportation infrastructure needs of our growing state. In summary, Senate Joint Resolution 1—if passed by a two-thirds vote in the House—would allow voters to approve or deny via the November ballot the use of \$5.7 billion of the projected \$12 billion rainy day fund for:

- **\$2 billion** in water projects construction/expansion via the State Water Plan
- **\$2.9 billion** in TxDOT debt-service payment, saving the state nearly \$6 billion in future spending
- **\$800 million** in funding to put more public school districts into formula funding

When elected to this position of authority subordinate to the citizens of Senate District 22, I knew tough votes such as for SJR 1 would be put in front of me. In response to a media inquiry on SJR 1, I gave the following response:

“This vote was perhaps the most difficult that I have cast since my election to the Texas Senate,” said Sen. Brian Birdwell (R-Granbury). “Though I firmly believe the dollar-amount set to be drawn from the rainy day fund should have been smaller and more proportional to our actions in 2011, I know that these funds will go to address our immediate water-supply challenges, reducing our transportation debt, and moving our school funding to a more equitable formula.” (4/24/13)

UPDATE: The Campus Personal Protection Act

The Campus Personal Protection Act (SB 182), which would allow Concealed Handgun License-holding faculty, staff, students and visitors to carry their personal-protection firearm throughout public higher

education campuses, is stalled in the Senate Criminal Justice Committee and my request for a hearing has not yet been scheduled. The House companion of our bill, HB 972 by Representative Allen Fletcher (R-Cypress), passed the House Public Safety Committee on April 11. Despite best efforts to move the bill out of committee without amendments, several functional changes were amended onto the bill. Representative Fletcher is committed to seeing HB 972 improved and returned to its original form during upcoming debate on the full House floor. For more information on this bill, please take a moment to read my recent op-ed here: <http://www.senate.state.tx.us/75r/Senate/Members/Dist22/pr13/p043013a.pdf>.

TSTC Partnership Bill Passes Senate 31-0

One of the best technical and career education institutions in the country can be found right in the heart of Senate District 22. Texas State Technical College (TSTC) has campuses throughout Texas but the system is headquartered in Waco. I was proud to work with the TSTC leadership on Senate Bill 922, which would modify the Texas Education Code to give the TSTC system authority to enter into partnerships with other institutions of higher education for the purpose of propagating advanced and emerging technical education. In order to be competitive globally, Texas business' and industry are dependent upon a career-ready, highly-skilled workforce. This legislation will enhance TSTC's ability to serve specific local workforce needs by partnering with community and junior colleges to provide technical education programs whenever such partnerships enhance the availability and/or the quality of technical education.



SD-22 Pastors Lead the Texas Senate in Prayer

As I have highlighted in the Capitol Update before, one of my favorite opportunities during session is to invite pastors from within SD-22 to lead the body in the invocation. Since our last update, we have welcomed three fine pastors down to Austin. From left to right, they are: **Pastor Troy Brewer**, Senior Pastor of Open Door Church in Joshua (Johnson County), and his wife, Leanna; **Reverend Gary Randle**, Co-Founder and Executive Director of H.O.P.E. Farm in Tarrant County; and **Reverend Ramiro Peña**, Founder and Pastor of Christ the King Baptist Church in Waco, and his wife, Orphalinda. Each of these gentlemen did an outstanding job and I thank them for serving as Pastors of the Day.

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 say thank you for your interest in the activities of your State Senate office and for your continued support!

God Bless,

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State Senator, District 22

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