



## **Pre-Session Capitol Update (12-18-14)**

Greetings from your Texas Capitol! For those of you who are receiving our Capitol Update for the first time, let me tell you a little bit about it. After the Christmas and New Year holidays, I will deploy back to Austin for the 84<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session. As you know, the Texas Legislature meets every other year for 140 days in order to file bills, debate policies and enact law on behalf of the people of Texas. During that time, my ability to be in the district and meet with constituents is diminished. In order to make sure I'm providing topical and pertinent information to you, the citizens I serve, my staff and I typically compile this newsletter on a bi-weekly basis throughout the session.

In the 18 months since the 83<sup>rd</sup> Legislative Session, my team and I have been busy. Just as I did after my first session, I spent several months traveling Senate District 22 and meeting with constituents to discuss both the outcomes of the session and updates on activity in their respective communities. After that, I spent most of 2014 between activities in the district and state business back in Austin. Much of that time involved work on the Sunset Advisory Commission and the Senate Finance Committee, both of which I will discuss below.

This “pre-session” Capitol Update will cover a number of items on which I want to update you, as well as some resources and alerts for the upcoming session. Look for more updates as the 84<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session begins in January, and approximately every two weeks throughout the session.

### **Sunset Advisory Commission**

As I have shared in previous Capitol Updates, I was appointed to serve as a member of the [Sunset Advisory Commission](#) (2012-15), the committee that administers the recurring legislatively-lead review and analysis of the continuing need for a state agency to exist or be statutorily changed to better serve the taxpayers. With the final committee hearing set for January 14<sup>th</sup>, we will soon begin the bill-drafting and bill-filing portion of the Sunset process. All recommendations voted on by the members of Sunset will be drafted into agency-specific pieces of legislation that will be voted on by the House and Senate and subject to the governor's signature or veto. Sunset Advisory Commission reports from 1982-2013 indicate a positive fiscal impact of approximately \$1 billion, and we anticipate our 2013-2015 legislative changes to result in even additional savings and more efficient state service for Texas taxpayers. As many of you have heard me say before, my appointment to Sunset is one I take quite seriously. I believe it is my duty to eradicate government waste and curb the unnecessary and excessive spending of taxpayer dollars whenever and wherever possible. This appointment has provided me with an opportunity to fulfill that very commitment to my constituents.

### **Senate Finance Committee**

Like Sunset, my 2014 appointment to the Senate Finance Committee has occupied a large amount of my time these last few months. As you may know, the biennial Texas budget begins taking shape long before the legislative session begins. The mechanisms for putting together our state's budget are complex and lengthy, making it essential for legislators to monitor every step of the process to ensure transparency and accountability as the budget bill comes together. My appointment to the Senate Finance Committee is perhaps the most rigorous and important activity to which I have been assigned since being elected to the Texas Senate. I share with my fellow committee members the responsibility of crafting a budget that accomplishes two major goals: first, to properly fund the functions for which our state government is constitutionally responsible, and

second, to do so with an unwavering effort to keep spending in check and to end diversions of dedicated taxpayer dollars. I am confident that it will require nothing less to ensure that Texas continues on its path of opportunity and prosperity.

### **Appointment from Senator Cruz**

In 2013, U.S. Senator Ted Cruz appointed me to serve as an inaugural member of his U.S. Service Academy Nominations Board. Each year, Senator Cruz has the honor to nominate for consideration qualified candidates to compete for appointment to United States service academies. As a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Senator Cruz works hard to ensure that we maintain our commitment to all service members, and this begins with helping to identify our best suited future military leaders. This begins by nominating those most qualified for the rigors of our military academies and to be future leaders of our military men and women. In this, the board's second year, I was deeply honored for the senator to name me as Chairman of the 22-member board. I consider it a great privilege to lead and facilitate the discussions among the many distinguished members of Senator Cruz's board.

### **Staff Announcements**

"Your subordinates' success is your success." That's one of my favorite military maxims, and as such, I never go into a legislative session without properly assembling and preparing the staff to help me serve the citizens of Senate District 22. While many of these are familiar, we have some new staff members who have replaced fine members of my previous staff who have either retired or moved into higher positions. Like last session, Chief of Staff Ben Stratmann will lead all three of our offices and Legislative Director Anna Paulson will run all policy operations in my Capitol office. Additionally, our highly-skilled team includes:

- Senior Policy Analyst Matt Cope
- Policy Analyst Mike Cicerone
- Policy Analyst Karson Nance
- Office Manager & Scheduler Liz Sanchez
- Constituent Communications Manager Megan Lehman
- Bullock Scholar Patrick Crosby (*Baylor Senior*)
- District Manager Taylor Blackburn (*Granbury Office*)
- District Manager Shelly Verlander (*Waco Office*)

With the high turnover in the Senate, we were presented with the opportunity to move to a different Capitol office (specifically, an office that more efficiently meets my team's needs for workspace during session). Should you wish to visit us in our Austin office, you can now find us in room number E1.706—same part of the Capitol, even the same hallway. All other information (mailing addresses, phone numbers, etc.) will remain the same.

### **Key Dates for the 83rd 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 incoming Lt. Governor Dan Patrick.
- March 13, 2015 (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.
- March 13, 2015 (60th day)—Unless the Governor declares emergency legislative items, this is the first day the Legislature may vote on filed legislation (both in committee and on the floor).
- Monday June 1, 2015 (140th day)—The final day of the 83rd regular session, also known as "sine die".
- Sunday June 21, 2015—This is the 20th day following adjournment and the last day the governor can sign or veto bills passed during the regular legislative session.
- Monday August 31, 2015—This is the 91st day following adjournment and the date that bills without specific effective dates become law.

### **Resources for the 84<sup>th</sup> 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](http://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, our Facebook and Twitter accounts are updated regularly.

### **Senate Page Opportunities**

The Honorary Page Program in the Texas Senate is an exciting opportunity providing insight into lawmaking procedures for young 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 such as making copies, and filing. Any parents or guardians interested in this opportunity may contact my Office Manager, Liz Sanchez, at [liz.sanchez@senate.state.tx.us](mailto:liz.sanchez@senate.state.tx.us).

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.

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'm voting on 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.

Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and God Bless,



Brian Birdwell  
State Senator, District 22

P.S. – On a personal note, “Team Birdwell” was elated to join my District Manager, Taylor Blackburn, and her husband in celebrating the birth of their first child—a lovely, healthy baby girl—in late November. Taylor is currently on maternity leave and will return to her duties in the Granbury district office in early February.

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