



Senator Birdwell's 'Capitol Update' **4-10-15**

Greetings from your Texas Capitol! The last two weeks have been particularly busy here in Austin, but I'm very pleased with some of the issues we've been able to tackle during that time. As we get closer to *sine die*—the Latin term we use to define the end of the legislative session—I will keep you posted on the status of our key legislation in both the House and Senate. For now, let's get into the Update.

Recent Visitors from Senate District 22



Joshua, Caleb, and Chloe Shetler of Johnson County served as honorary pages in the Texas Senate recently. They enjoyed shadowing the Senate Messengers and Sergeants as they worked in the Capitol building.



It was an honor to have Pastor Michael Nemeck of Christ Lutheran Church in Hillsboro come to Austin to offer the invocation in the Senate Chamber recently. We are pictured here with Lt. Governor Dan Patrick (left).

Update from the Senate Committee on Nominations

As Chairman of the Senate Committee on Nominations, I have spent a great amount of time this session reviewing gubernatorial nominees to the state boards and commissions. In all, the state has 360 different boards and commissions, the membership of which comprises some 4,500 Texans. The state constitution requires that the Governor nominate individuals to fill those slots, after which, each nominee must be confirmed by the Texas Senate. As chair of the committee that approves (or "confirms") these nominees, I am humbled with the important task—along with my fellow committee members—of vetting the men and women who will serve our state in an unelected capacity. So far this session, we have addressed nominees for a variety of state positions, including Inspector General for the Department of State Health Services, Commissioner of Insurance, Texas Secretary of State, the Public Safety Commission, the Texas Transportation Commission, various members of the judiciary, and the boards of regents for some of our major universities.

River Authority Bill Passes Senate 31-0

I'm excited about the unanimous passage of Senate Bill 523 in the Senate this week, which brings us one step closer to creating a recurring [Sunset Advisory Commission](#) review of all Texas river authorities. The Commission is well-equipped to conduct reviews of each river authority's governance, management, operating structure, and compliance with legislative requirements; furthermore, the Commission will provide specific recommendations of a river authority, which can then be enacted in law by the legislature. River authorities will be reviewed on a biannual basis in an order recommended by Sunset Advisory Commission staff—you can read more about this process in my press release here:

<http://www.senate.state.tx.us/75r/Senate/Members/Dist22/pr15/p040915a.pdf>.

Of particular interest to the constituents I serve in Senate District 22 are the Brazos River Authority (BRA) and the Trinity River Authority (TRA)—two of the largest river authorities in Texas, the two of which cover the overwhelming majority of SD-22. In 2014, we were able to secure two separate and unique reviews of the BRA by both the Legislative Budget Board and the State Auditor's Office. These two assessments were the practical equivalent of a Sunset review, essentially making the BRA the first river authority to see any such type of review in decades. Their next review will begin in 2021, and the TRA's review will begin in 2019. I'm excited about this pivotal legislation, and I am grateful for the support I received to pass it after it has failed for so many sessions.

Key Legislation Passed by the Senate

Along with the focus I place on my own bills, my team and I always work to identify good legislation for me to co-author and help drive through the legislative process. Here are a few of those bills that passed the Senate recently:

Senate Bill 18 (Nelson) – This bill grows our state's physician workforce (particularly in critical shortage areas) by expanding graduate medical education (GME) residency slots. We encourage rural community clinics to provide new residency programs by allowing them to partner with schools and hospitals to navigate the accreditation process; we combine and streamline existing residency expansion programs, putting an emphasis on geographic and specialty shortages; and we create a permanent fund which lays the foundation for a long-term solution to ensure our graduate medical education slots keep pace with our growing population, retaining Texas-trained doctors to practice in Texas.

Senate Bill 10 (Huffman) – Currently, the prosecution of public officials accused of crimes against public administration is handled by the state-funded Public Integrity Unit (PIU). Problematically, however, the PIU is controlled by the Travis County District Attorney, and as such is accountable only to the citizens of that county. This legislation moves the PIU's functions under the purview of the Texas Rangers, granting them the power to subpoena for crimes against public administration, and, if after finding merit to do so, to refer valid cases to the home county district attorney of the accused party.

Senate Bill 9 (Hancock) – This bill would provide stricter limits on state government spending by directing the LBB to determine the state spending limit via population growth and inflation, rather than simply considering personal income. The result of this methodology would more accurately reflect the state's needs, ultimately ensuring appropriate spending on the core functions of government.

That's all for this edition of the Capitol Update. I welcome you to share this newsletter with your friends, family and colleagues in Senate District 22. Additionally, they can subscribe to the Update here:

<http://www.senate.state.tx.us/75r/Senate/members/dist22/Signup.htm>.

As always, I hope you will take advantage of the opportunity to keep up with the happenings at your Texas Capitol. Please visit my official website at www.senate.state.tx.us, follow us on [Facebook](#)/[Twitter](#), and for all other needs, please visit the Texas Legislature Online at www.capitol.state.tx.us.

Finally, with Easter just around the corner, Mel and I want to wish each of you a safe, happy holiday with family and friends. God bless you and God bless Texas!

Sincerely,



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