



Capitol Update (3-27-21)

Greetings from your Texas Capitol! Since our last Capitol Update, my colleagues and I have been busily reviewing and debating a wide array of legislation in both chambers of the Legislature, and things will only continue to ramp up. I have a good bit of information I want to share with you in this edition of the Update, so here we go.

ERCOT Pricing Adjustment Legislation (SB 2142)

Last week, the Senate took action to address the billing error made by ERCOT during Winter Storm Uri. Addressing this issue was a clear priority for Lt. Gov. Patrick and the members of the Senate, so we worked quickly to pass Senate Bill 2142 by Senator Bryan Hughes (R-Mineola), which requires the Texas Public Utility Commission (PUC) to correct billing errors to save electric customers billions of dollars. The recent, unprecedented winter storm placed unexpected challenges on the Texas electric grid. During the storm, the PUC set the wholesale electric rate at the capped rate of \$9,000 per megawatt-hour. ERCOT continued to charge the maximum rate for an additional 32 hours beyond load shed, which according to testimony, should have triggered a price reduction. I voted in favor of and fully support SB 2142 to protect retail electric customers from inaccurate billing errors during this period of time. This is now in the Texas House of Representatives awaiting consideration.

Senate Passes Essential Caregiver Legislation (SB 25 and SJR 19)

Last week, the Texas Senate unanimously approved SB 25 and SJR 19 by Senator Lois Kolkhorst (R-Brenham) to strengthen visitation rights for loved ones in long-term care facilities. During COVID-19, many Texas residents in nursing homes and similar settings were not allowed to maintain contact and personal visits with friends and family for months during the declared public health disaster. During last year's pandemic response, state agency rules were imposed that restricted access to long-term care facilities, such as nursing homes and state-supported living centers, even if there were no cases of the illness present. Consequently, many families across the state were denied any personal visits with parents, children, spouses, and others residing in long-term facilities during the pandemic. SB 25 and its accompanying constitutional amendment, SJR 19, codify a resident's right to designate an essential caregiver and directs the health agency to establish guidelines to ensure resident and staff safety during caregiving visits. These specific guidelines will provide certainty and consistency for caregivers, residents, and long-term care providers so that loved ones in a care setting are not deprived visitation by family. These bills passed with bipartisan and unanimous support; SB 25 and SJR 19 now head to the Texas House for consideration.

Senate Passes Religious Liberty Legislation (SJR 27 and SB 26)

On Thursday, the Senate overwhelmingly passed a bill and a joint resolution to further protect our religious liberties. I was proud to support Senator Hancock's (R-North Richland Hills) SJR 27 and Senator Paxton's (R-Plano) SB 26. SJR 27 amends the Texas Constitution to restrict a political subdivision from adopting a decision that would prohibit or limit religious services. This will further clarify and ensure that no geopolitical subdivision can implement restrictions on a citizen's ability to exercise their freedom of religion at their houses of worship at any time. SB 26 clarifies the religious freedom code to expressly prohibit the closure of places of worship in the state of Texas, by any government agency or public official, as a result of the emergency powers granted to them during a disaster declaration. SB 26 would function under existing legal procedures found in the Texas Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1999 (RFRA), namely in providing a waiver of sovereign immunity if violated, a private cause of action, and the ability of the government to cure a violation if provided notice of the intention of a party to bring legal action. These two bills work in conjunction with each other, and I look forward to seeing them both make it through the legislative process. They, too, are in the Texas House of Representatives for consideration.

Capitol Visits from SD-22

In just the past few weeks, my team and I have enjoyed the honor of welcoming numerous constituents and elected officials from Senate District 22 at the Capitol! This week, I got to visit with Tarrant County Sheriff Bill Waybourn and Mayor Ron Jensen from the City of Grand Prairie. I also had the distinct pleasure to visit with a group of international allied officers from the US Air War College located at Maxwell Air Force Base in Mississippi. It was a group of 24 officers from allied countries around the world. I very much enjoyed speaking with them about the Texas legislature and providing each of them with one of my challenge coins.

It is always my pleasure to see my constituents and answer their thoughtful questions about the Legislature's work and visit about the direct impact our work will have on them, the citizens we serve.



Pictured here with Mayor Ron Jensen from The city of Grand Prairie.



Joining the allied officers from the US Air War College.

Next week will be another busy week in the Texas Senate. We will be working hard to pass several pro-life legislation out of the Senate and will be working on several election integrity bills. In addition, my priority bills relating to the Legislature's authority during declared disaster and emergencies (SB 1025 and SJR 45) will be heard in the Senate State Affairs Committee on Wednesday, March 31st.

As always, I hope our Capitol Update is 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](#). You can keep in touch with legislative happenings via <https://capitol.texas.gov/> or via my Senate website by clicking the screenshot below.

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Senator Brian Birdwell: District 22

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Occupation: Retired US Army Officer; Founder and President of Non-Profit

Education: Lamar University in Beaumont, B.S. Criminal Justice, 1984; University of Missouri-Kansas City, Masters of Public Administration, 1996; Graduate, Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 2000

Legislative Experience: Senate Member: 2010 - present

Hometown: Granbury

Party: Republican

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Click here to e-mail the Office of Senator Brian Birdwell

Press Room

12/06/2016
Legislators File Resolutions, Associated Bills Calling For Article V Convention Of States

08/22/2016
Senator Birdwell's Closing Letter to TCEO re

God bless,

Brian Birdwell
State Senator, District 22