



Pre-Session Capitol Update (1-6-17)

Greetings from your Texas Capitol! For those receiving our Capitol Update for the first time, let me tell you a little bit about it. With Christmas and the holidays now behind us, I have deployed back to Austin for the 85th 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 10 counties of Senate District 22 with constituents is greatly 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 twice per month throughout the session.

In the 18 months since the conclusion of the 84th legislative session, my team and I have been busy. Just as I do after each 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. More so than in any of my previous two interims (2012, 2014), however, my post-session schedule was full of legislative activity associated with special committees and task forces to which I was been appointed.

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 85th legislative session begins on Tuesday of next week (1/8/17), and approximately every two weeks throughout the session. Speaking of Tuesday, if you plan to visit the Texas Capitol for inauguration day, please feel free to stop by our office—my team and I are still located in office E1.706 in the Capitol Extension.



*Senate Finance Committee Hearing on
Emergency Funding for Child Protective Services*



*Jalyn Knight Serves as an Honorary Page for
Senator Birdwell in 2015*

Border Security

During the 2015 legislative session and this interim, I have been honored to chair the Veteran Affairs and Military Installations Subcommittee on Border Security and to co-chair the Joint Interim Committee to Study Border Security.

The Senate's Subcommittee on Border Security was charged with conducting a thorough and detailed study of the following issues, and preparing recommendations to address problems or issues that were subsequently identified:

- **Sanctuary Cities:** Study the various sanctuary city policies statewide, the number and types of crimes committed by previously arrested illegal immigrants within the jurisdiction of a "sanctuary policy," and possible solutions to discourage governmental entities from putting in place policies that conflict with immigration laws. Make recommendations to improve community safety.
- **Local Law Enforcement/PEP:** Study local government efforts to secure their border communities and identify areas where the state could invest to bolster local law enforcement infrastructure and activities. Review the challenges faced by state and local law enforcement when providing border security, including the federal Priority Enforcement Program (PEP).
- **Interstate Compact:** Conduct a cost-benefit analysis of a potential interstate compact on border security, and consider the constitutional and legal questions that underpin the proposal. Consider which other states might be party to an interstate compact on border security. Make recommendations for policies that Texas should adopt pursuant to an interstate compact, if it were authorized by the Legislature and approved by Congress.

The Committee held four hearings throughout the interim and I released our report in early November. That report [can be found online](#).

The Joint Interim Committee to Study Border Security—comprised of both Senators and Representatives, five each—was charged with the oversight of the execution and implementation of state resources that will help to secure the Texas/Mexico border. Through legislative direction and law enforcement action, Texas has taken the necessary steps and allocated key resources to stop and interdict criminal activity from crossing into our state. Mostly notably, during the 84th legislative session, the legislature passed several border security bills to correspond with a historic level of funding and resources for our law enforcement to help combat crime at our southern border and throughout Texas. The committee monitored the status of the implementation of these border security bills throughout the interim.

Senate Finance Committee

My interim appointment to the Senate Finance Committee occupied a considerable amount of my time during the past 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, all without raising taxes. I firmly believe that it will require nothing less to ensure that Texas continues on its path of opportunity and prosperity.

Legislative Budget Board Approves Additional Spending for CPS

During the 2016 interim, I was appointed to the Senate Finance Workgroup on Child Protection. Four Senate Finance colleagues and I were charged with finding a financial solution for spreading out the extremely high caseload at the Child Protective Services arm of the Department of Family and Protective Services. In recent years, our caseworkers have been overworked and underpaid, resulting in high turnover and inadequate service for some of the neediest minors in our state. The workgroup recommended to the Legislative Budget Board (LBB) that the state immediately fund additional caseworkers and salary increases to help alleviate the load. These recommendations were quickly adopted and enacted by the LBB, and will serve as a starting point for

critical discussions about CPS funding and practices in the coming legislative session. I applaud Senate Finance Chair Jane Nelson for her attention to this matter, and Senator Charles Schwertner for leading our workgroup.

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 appointments to United States military 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. On our end, this process starts with nominating those most qualified for the rigors of our military academies and to be the future leaders of our military men and women. I have been a member of the 22-member board for four years, and have been honored to serve as chairman for the past three years. I consider it a great privilege to lead and facilitate the discussions among the many distinguished members of this group.



Members of Senator Ted Cruz's U.S. Service Academy Nominations Board in Austin in 2016

Staff Announcements

"Your subordinates' success is your success"—that's one of my favorite military maxims, as the success of my staff in their positions helps to make me a better servant to my constituents. Therefore, I never go into a legislative session without properly assembling and preparing a staff to help me serve the citizens of Senate District 22. While many of these names may be familiar to longtime subscribers of our Capitol Update, we have some new staff members who have replaced fine members of my previous staff who have moved on to other positions. Like last session, Chief of Staff Ben Stratmann will lead all three of our offices and Legislative Director Anna Barnett will run all policy operations in my Capitol office. Additionally, our highly-skilled team includes:

- Senior Policy Analyst Matt Cope
- Policy Analyst Mic Davis
- Policy Analyst Jarred Shaffer
- Office Manager & Scheduler Liz Sanchez
- Constituent Correspondence Manager Megan Lehmann
- Bullock Scholar John Ryan Isaacson (*Baylor University Junior*)
- District Manager Taylor Blackburn (*Granbury Office*)
- District Manager Shelly Verlander (*Waco Office*)

Key Dates for the 85th 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 Lt. Governor Dan Patrick.
- March 10, 2017 (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. Unless the Governor declares emergency

legislative items, this is the first day the Legislature may vote on filed legislation without a vote of 4/5 of the House or Senate.

- May 29, 2017 (140th day)—The final day of the 85th regular session, also known as “sine die”. The final weeks—and particularly days—of the session are nearly non-stop; this date is Memorial Day, and the Senate will be working as we have in previous sessions.
- June 18, 2017—This is the 20th day following adjournment and the last day the governor can sign or veto bills passed during the regular legislative session.
- August 28, 2017—This is the 91st day following adjournment and the date that bills without specific effective dates become law.

Resources for the 85th 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) 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, my staff and I both update my Facebook and Twitter accounts regularly.

Senate Page Opportunities

The Honorary Page Program in the Texas Senate is an exciting opportunity providing insight into lawmaking procedures for 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. Any parents or guardians interested in this opportunity may contact my Office Manager, Liz Sanchez, at liz.sanchez@senate.texas.gov.

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. In that same vein, I hope you will consider forwarding this Capitol Update to your family, friends in colleagues [residing in Senate District 22](#). If you know someone who would like to receive future editions of our Capitol Update, please visit [my official website to subscribe!](#)

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 am casting votes based upon 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.

Happy New Year and God Bless,



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