



Capitol Update (2-8-17)

Greetings from your Texas Capitol! It's a busy time for us here at the statehouse in Austin. The Senate Finance Committee is actively working on the 2018-19 biennial state budget, Governor Abbott has assigned the legislature four "emergency items" to consider immediately, and legislators are actively filing new bills each day. We'll get into all of that and more in this edition of our Capitol Update.



At the Senate State Affairs Committee hearing last week, where I joined my fellow committee members in a unanimous vote for the ethics reform bill package by Senator Van Taylor (R-Plano).

Gubernatorial Emergency Items

At his biannual State of the State address on January 31st, Governor Greg Abbott shared his outlook on the challenges facing Texas and where we are leading as a state, as well as the steps he believes necessary to keep Texas moving successfully forward. In addition to discussing pivotal issues such as public education, transportation infrastructure and mental health reforms, Gov. Abbott announced four "emergency items"—these formal declarations allow for the legislature to waive the 60-day prohibition on hearing legislation and to immediately consider these issues. The emergency items are:

- **Sanctuary Cities (SB 4)** – An ongoing issue in Texas, this bill would prohibit "sanctuary city" policies, i.e. policies prohibiting local law enforcement from inquiring about a person's immigration status after lawful detention or from complying with federal detainer requests. These policies also often prohibit the sharing of information regarding a person's immigration status with the federal government. [NOTE: SB 4 passed the Senate today and now moves to the House of Representatives.]
- **Child Protective Services (SB 11)** – This legislation addresses the statewide foster-care capacity crisis; improves accountability throughout the Texas Child Protective Services (CPS) system; ensures all children

and youth have timely access to appropriate and necessary support and services to improve child safety, permanency and well-being; and enhances foster care redesign, which has produced positive outcomes for children and families.

- **Ethics Reform (SB 14)** – The Ethics Reform & Anti-Corruption Act of 2017 stands upon four major pillars. The bill requires elected officials convicted of a felony to lose their pension and office; creates more concise, publicly-accessible disclosure of government contracts, bond counsel and legal referral-fees received by public officials and their immediate family; shines a brighter light on lobbyist “wining and dining” of legislators and their staff; and establishes a clear demarcation between an individual serving the public as an elected official and also seeking to lobby on behalf of a special interest. [NOTE: SB 14 passed the Senate on Tuesday and now moves to the House of Representatives.]
- **Convention of States (SJR 2 / SB 21)** – One of my top priorities for the 85th legislative session, this resolution (SJR 2) and accompanying bill (SB 21) would call for an Article V convention of states and define the legislative process by which delegates to a convention would be appointed. For more on this issue, I would encourage you to visit my Senate website to [read our press release](#) on the filing of this legislation.



Visiting with one of the three new members of the Texas Senate, my colleague Senator Borris Miles (D-Houston).

Additional Joint Authored and Co-Authored Bills

As I outlined in [our most recent Capitol Update](#), a legislator can add his or her signature to any bill (with the permission of the bill author) to show their support of a particular issue. Since that last update, I have signed on to several bills, including:

- **SB 8 by Schwertner (R-Georgetown)** – SB 8 will fight to protect the dignity and sanctity of life by increasing criminal penalties for buying or selling human fetal tissue, among other protections, and will ban partial birth abortion and dismemberment abortions in Texas.
- **SB 12 by West (D-Dallas)** – SB 12 will help ensure the safety of police officers across the state by creating a grant program within the Criminal Justice Division of the Office of the Governor to provide financial assistance to a law enforcement agency seeking to equip its officers with bulletproof vests.
- **SB 13 by Huffman (R-Houston)** – Eliminates the practice of collecting dues from the paychecks of public employees in order to remove government from the affairs of trade unions, labor unions, employees' associations, or professional associations
- **SB 626-628 by Schwertner (R-Georgetown)** – This bill package greatly strengthens private property rights by providing more information to landowners and requiring certain disclosures of condemning entities; by providing more information to landowners about their survey-related rights; and by providing a property owner the ability to more successfully buy back condemned land by tightening the current definition of the "actual progress" a condemning entity must show in order to keep condemned land.
- **SB 667 by Zaffirini (D-Laredo)** – Creates a guardianship compliance program to provide additional resources to courts handling guardianship cases and improve guardianship compliance. This program will help to protect our most vulnerable citizens and their assets.

- **SB 715 by Campbell (R-New Braunfels)** – The Texas Annexation Reform Act makes the municipal annexation process more democratic by requiring the consent of the majority of registered voters in a proposed area for annexation and promoting greater communication between cities and residents to emphasize full stakeholder involvement. It also streamlines the process for land owners requesting to be annexed, cutting costs and eliminating bureaucratic red tape.

Hail and Farewell

In the military, a “hail and farewell” commonly refers to a joint ceremony welcoming individuals into a new unit, while at the same time honoring the individuals departing that unit. In that spirit, Team Birdwell is excited to welcome Mallory Coon as the new District Manager for the northern counties of Senate District 22 (Ellis, Hood, Johnson, Somervell and Tarrant [partial]). Mallory is a lifelong Texan, a graduate of Stephen F. Austin State University, and comes from a diverse background in broadcast news, grassroots engagement and community interaction. Of course as we welcome Mallory, we are naturally sad to lose our longtime District Manager, Taylor Blackburn, who has been an important part of ‘Team Birdwell’ since early 2012. Taylor’s husband was recently accepted into the U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence at Fort Rucker, AL—what civilians know simply as “flight school.” While we are proud of Taylor’s husband and this important new step in his military service to our nation, we are sorry to lose a great servant of Senate District 22. In the best interest of serving the constituents of my northern five counties, Mallory has already joined our staff and will be training with Taylor prior to her departure. The staff and I look forward to continually providing the best service possible to the citizens I serve, and we welcome your outreach to Mallory at our existing Granbury office number below or via mallory.coon@senate.texas.gov.



Chairing my first Senate Nominations Committee hearing of 2017, where we heard testimony from the three newest appointees to the University of Texas System Board of Regents.

In closing, I want to thank you again for reading this update from ‘Team Birdwell.’ I hope you found it to be 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](#).

God Bless,

Brian Birdwell
State Senator, District 22

Austin: (512) 463-0122 // Waco: (254) 776-6225 // Granbury: (817) 573-9622
brian.birdwell@senate.texas.gov // www.senate.texas.gov