

Senator Birdwell's 'Capitol Update' 3-9-15

Greetings from <u>your</u> Texas Capitol! The last few weeks have been busy, and we're still one week short of the constitutional 60-day mark at which we can begin hearing legislation (other than gubernatorial-declared emergency items). Let's get right into it!





Honoring Hood County and the City of West

Since our last Update, I had the distinct privilege to honor two very important groups of people representing two communities which are very special to me.

Pictured first (left) are the representatives of the Hood County Tornado Recovery Committee; Marilyn Luton, Committee Chair and President of the United Way of Hood County; Toni Brown-Balew, Executive Directive United Way of Hood County; Lance Terry, President of the Board of Directors, Mission Granbury; Mary Flores, former Case Manager Mission Granbury; and Sunny Erwin, Texas Neighborhood Services. I was proud to honor this group with a resolution for the tireless efforts in helping our community recover from the devastating tornado in May of 2013—all on a volunteer basis.

Pictured second (right) are some of the local leaders of the City of West; Mayor Tommy Muska, Mayor Pro Tem Steve Vanek, Councilman Bryan Muska, and City Secretary Shelly Nors. My friend and colleague, Representative Kyle Kacal, is pictured to the far right. On West Day, I was humbled to be able to recognize this group with a resolution for the citizens of West, all of whom have made great strides in rebuilding their wonderful community after the West Fertilizer Plant Explosion in April of 2013. That could not have been done without this great leadership team.

Updates on Filed Legislation

In recent Updates, we have been sharing summaries of some of the bills I have filed thus far, as well as key bills that I have co-authored with my Senate colleagues. Here are a few more additions to that list:

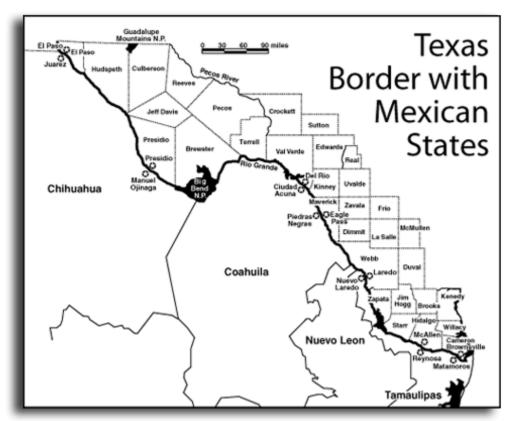
SB 525 – Requires that a tax lender to notify any mortgage servicer, holder of a recorded preexisting lien encumbering the property, and collector for any taxing authority that holds a tax lien, that the property owner has authorized the said lender to pay off their taxes. The enhanced disclosures and notices will ensure that all parties are aware of the tax lien transfer.

SB 557 – This legislation creates the framework for counties impacted by a tolling authority—even if in a limited capacity—to be part of the authority's advisory council. The North Texas Tollway Authority, for example, is traditionally governed by its four "member" counties in the Metroplex, but part of its road system touches Johnson County. This bill would ensure that citizens with a small stake in a tolling authority's roadways (e.g. Johnson County) would get a seat at the leadership table. We're working this bill with Rep. DeWayne Burns (R-Cleburne).

SB 743 – Creates the sales tax reduction (STaR) fund, a function within the state budget whereby the legislature can appropriate money to temporarily reduce the sales tax for all Texans. Funds would also come from any dollars above the constitutional limit (or "cap") on the Economic Stabilization Fund (or "rainy day fund"). Currently, those dollars above the cap simply go into General Revenue.

SB 1 by Nelson (R-Flower Mound) — As filed, Senate Bill 1 increases the homestead exemption for school district taxes from \$15,000 to 25% of the Texas home median market value, providing approximately \$2.5 billion in tax relief for the 2016-2017 biennium. Importantly, the legislature will appropriate funds to Texas school districts to completely backfill this difference, ensuring no disparate impact on schools.

SB 7 by Nelson (R-Flower Mound) – Senate Bill 7 provides \$1.5 billion in business tax relief over the biennium by reducing the franchise tax rate by 15 percent. This is an excellent step in the path to trimming (if not eliminating) this cumbersome tax on Texas businesses.



Stronger Border, Safer Texas

This week, State Representative Dennis Bonnen (R-Angleton) and I filed identical companion bills (HB 11 and SB 3, respectively) to address ongoing concerns with the porous Texas-Mexico border. The major tenets of the legislation include expanding the state law enforcement presence on the border, increasing penalties for illegal activity at the border, and establishing cooperative law enforcement information centers throughout the region. To read more about the bill and review my comments on the issue, please take a look at the press release we sent out on Tuesday: Birdwell Files 'Stronger Border, Safer Texas' Act. Our bill has been given priority status by Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick—this is traditionally signified by the assignment of a "low" bill number (usually SB 1-20)—and the subject of border security has been declared an emergency item by Governor Greg Abbott. The discussions we're having and the subsequent actions we are taking to address this problematic issue are not something I take lightly. Time after time, the federal government has made it clear that it will not fulfil its constitutional duties; until this changes, the State of Texas will stand in the gap.

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 <u>your</u> Texas Capitol. Please visit my official website at <u>www.senate.state.tx.us</u>, follow us on <u>Facebook/Twitter</u>, and for all other needs, please visit the Texas Legislature Online at <u>www.capitol.state.tx.us</u>.

God bless you and God bless Texas!

Sidwell

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