

Fall 2015

## The Capitol Report

### Dear Constituents and Friends,

*"It's a new day,"* was the decree of first term Lt. Governor Dan Patrick. And so it was. The statement signaled a different order of business for the Texas Senate. So did the influence of eight new senators seated on the session's opening day with an ninth to join - following a special election to replace former colleague, ally and friend Sen. Leticia Van de Putte - to represent Bexar County.

Talk was rampant leading up to the 84th Legislature about whether or not the Lt. Governor would follow through on campaign promises regarding committee chair assignments. One result was that for the first time in six legislative sessions, I would not be appointed as chairman of a standing Senate Committee. However, I was given my preference of committee assignments and chose to serve the citizens of District 23 and the State of Texas on Senate Finance, Education, Higher Education - where I was vice chairman, and on Administration. And so, the legislative session began.

Soon gone was the Senate's tradition of the two-thirds rule that required affirmation from 21 of 31 members to bring legislation to the Senate floor for debate. It would be replaced by a three-fifths rule; requiring just 19 senators to permit a bill to be discussed in the chamber. The two-thirds rule that we knew, required a degree of bipartisan cooperation, particularly on matters of crucial importance to the citizens of Texas. The new rule allows an even safer margin for majority rule politics. It's a new Senate and a changing legislature, but one that still must meet the challenges caused by rapid population growth and shifting demographics. Also, for the first time in 14 years, the Legislature opened with a new resident in the Governor's Mansion, former Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott.

Nevertheless, the citizens of District 23 deserve results not excuses, so my job proceeded just the same and progress was made. With money pouring in from Texas' greatest benefactor, the energy sector, state coffers were full. Although many doubted, we passed a FY16-17 budget without the need of a special session. The budget includes more funding for public schools, increased dollars for retired teachers and exceeds amounts spent on TEXAS Grants over recent budget cycles. Medicaid caseload growth is fully-funded for 2016-17 and \$2.8 billion has been appropriated to improve mental health treatment. However, rates paid to providers continues to be an issue. For the first time in a long time, the Legislature chose to invest in state facilities that have been ravaged by attrition and a succession of budget cuts.

I've been fortunate to have never left a legislative session empty-handed and this one was no exception. Funding was secured for a third building at UNT Dallas. And with the passage of SB158, Texas will jump to the national forefront in its deployment of body cameras by law enforcement.

As always, I am thankful for the opportunity to serve and for the trust you have placed in me once again. And I can never say enough about the sacrifices made by those who allow me to serve you.

*Royce West*



State Senator Royce West & Mrs. Carol West

# CAPITOL REPORT

## Finance and Budget

Who wouldn't be happy at the end of the year to have taken a look at their bank account to find more money than you'd expected after all the bills were paid. That was Texas' good fortune to find \$7.5 billion unencumbered from the 2014-15 budget; money that can be carried over to 2016-17 to face the challenges of a fast-growing state. To remind, Texas does not have (and never will) a state income tax. Its revenue stream depends mostly on the sales tax, fees and remittances from the much-maligned federal government.

The biennial revenue estimate delivered in January 2015 said that lawmakers can expect to have about \$98 billion in tax collections and another \$12.7 billion from non-tax revenue. Add about \$73 billion from Washington and \$39 billion in fees and other income and Texas is expected to have amassed about \$221 billion in combined revenue by the end of FY17.

By the final week of the legislative session, the House and Senate had reached agreement on a two-year budget of \$209.4 billion. We set aside \$2.5 billion for transfer to the state's Economic Stabilization (Rainy Day) Fund and another \$2.5 billion for highways, the result of last November's Proposition 1.

The budget tops the amount appropriated for FY14-15 by \$7.34 billion. That figure includes \$1.2 billion in tax revenue which was spent against the budget for promised property tax relief. This was done by raising the homestead exemption threshold from \$15,000 to \$25,000. Your share on average, comes to about \$120 for two years, based on statewide home values. Another \$2.6 billion will go uncollected as the business franchise tax was cut by 25 percent. Under this plan, a business with up to \$20 million in revenue (now \$10 million) will be taxed at a lower E-Z computation rate.

Funding for public schools rose to \$58.43 billion, up 5.5 percent over the previous budget. However, we still await a Texas Supreme Court ruling on whether we've spent enough in answer to a 2011 lawsuit filed by more than 600 school districts who think not. Rather than spending more general revenue directly on schools and teachers and kids, we will spend \$3.8 billion to replace dollars used for tax cuts. And Teacher Retirement System funding was boosted by \$768 million to make sure that it remains solvent.

Critics say that Texas has done little to address huge increases in college costs since deregulating tuition in 2005. Next biennium's budget will reflect an increase of \$68.2 million in general revenue (GR) - dedicated tuition funding. Higher education institutions will also see an increase of more than \$391 million in formula funding for enrollment growth and Instruction and Operations. Nearly \$63 million was added to TEXAS Grants funding over the previous budget and grant funding for graduate-level medical students was increased by \$38.75 million.

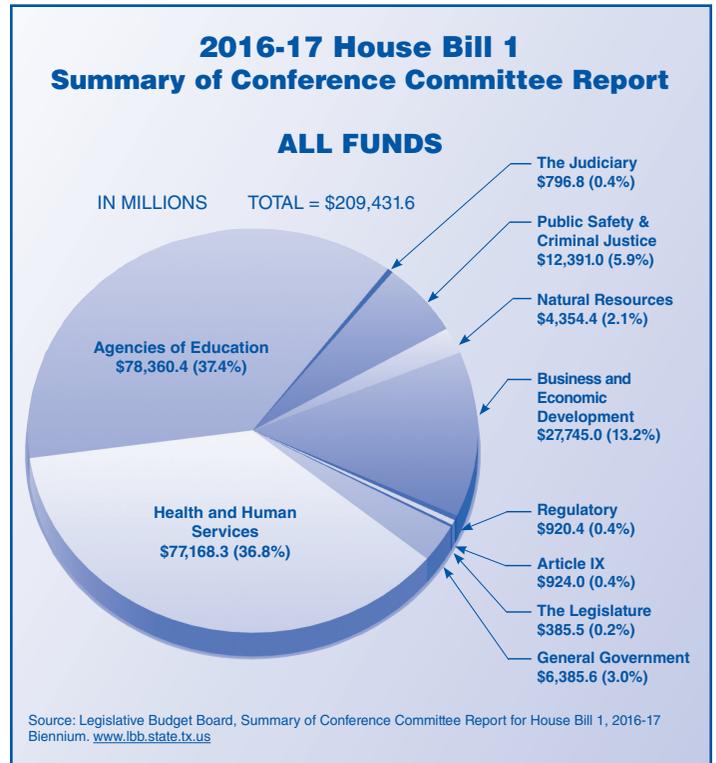
Texas will double the amount of money it provided for border security in the previous budget. Even the Department of Public Safety (DPS) said it's not quite sure how the \$800 million will be spent.

The FY16-17 budget will appropriate some \$61.2 billion to fund Medicaid. This includes money to fully-fund Medicaid caseload growth and to transition eligible CHIP recipients to Medicaid. Payments to hospitals, including rural, safety-net, and trauma centers like Parkland Hospital will increase by 573 million.

Eighteen state agencies will receive a share of the total of \$3.6 billion that Texas will spend on mental health and substance abuse services in FY16-17. This includes money for treat-

ing veterans, child advocacy centers, and behavioral intervention services for those suffering from intellectual and developmental disabilities. We budgeted \$46.5 million for outpatient mental health services and to help reduce waiting lists.

Legislation passed in 2013 will provide more funds to invest in Texas' 195,000 miles of roadways. Last year, voters approved Proposition 1 that will send \$1.7 billion in oil and gas



tax revenue from 2015 and \$2.4 billion in FY16-17 that would normally go to the Rainy Day Fund to instead be deposited in the highway fund.

State leaders and lawmakers finally delivered on past promises to end diversions from the gas tax that was created to be spent on roads. And in a change of philosophy, the Legislature took a long hard look at the level of debt the state has incurred over a decade of using bond financing to pay for new roads. \$2.2 billion has been allocated for debt service payment and bills passed this session call for TxDOT to find ways to accelerate paying off transportation-related bond debt that totals nearly \$24 billion.

For years, state agencies have made their pleas to the Legislature for funds to address their aging facilities. Texas - along with the rest of the nation - has seemingly endured more economic downswings than windfalls over the past decade. The results are buildings that have been flagged unfit by local code inspectors. The agencies' pleas were answered. \$739 million was allocated for facilities repair.

Texas Parks & Wildlife, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, TxDOT and DPS will benefit from these funds. And many buildings within the Capitol Complex will be part of a \$100 million makeover.

## Education

Even though Texas will spend \$2.7 billion more on public education than we did for FY14-15, we could have done more to restore schools to 2010 funding levels that existed before \$5.4 billion in cuts were imposed by the Legislature in 2011. For now, schools will settle for the \$1.2 billion more in basic allotment monies that will raise per pupil funding to \$5,140. For school districts who meet certain requirements, there will be an additional \$55.5 million for existing instructional facilities and \$47.5 million for new buildings above the previous appropriation.

Another \$40.6 million is targeted for reading and math academies for K-3 teachers. The budget allocates more than \$1 billion for instructional materials and expands Pre-K offerings by \$118 million. Still, the Legislature did not use more of the dollars it had available.



Senator West during Senate Finance Committee hearing with (l to r) Chairman Jane Nelson and Senators Whitmire, Eltife and Uresti.

# CAPITOL REPORT

I generally support legislation that will improve student academic achievement and that makes the most efficient use of tax dollars. So I supported the intent of HB2804 that moves us away from near total reliance on standardized testing to measure a school's performance. As part of a new weighted domain system, testing would account for no more than 55 percent of a schools' rating. Schools will be evaluated on how well they address identified student achievement gaps and academic growth based on STAAR results. Student and parent engagement will also be quantified as one of five domains.

However, I believe strongly that we will do campuses a disservice in assigning annual ratings of A-F, with D and F rated as "unacceptable." How do schools and campuses recover from such a rating? Is this a death knell for struggling schools and districts?

HB1842 offers a remedy for beleaguered campuses. The new law requires any campus that is rated unacceptable for two consecutive years to prepare a turnaround plan for submission to TEA. The turnaround plan would take effect if there is a third unacceptable rating. But if the campus is rated acceptable the fol-

Funding for Texas Educational Opportunity Grants that provide financial assistance to students who attend two-year colleges will increase by \$28.9 million.

## University of North Texas at Dallas

Good things continue to happen for the University of North Texas at Dallas and the UNT-Dallas College of Law. For the first time since its inception, UNT Dallas received formula funding as a stand-alone institution, not connected to the University of North Texas System. The \$9.6 million appropriation is an increase of \$1.9 million over FY14-15 funding.

It was also first time for the UNT Dallas - College of Law to receive its own formula funding. A total of \$2.3 million will be available for FY16-17.

The Legislature approved its first Tuition Revenue Bond (TRB) package since 2006. From it, UNT Dallas will receive \$63 million for the construction of a third building on its 260 acre campus. In addition, \$56 million was appropriated for the renovation of the Old Dallas City Hall Building that will be the law school's permanent site.

UT Southwestern is also a recipient of TRB funding as they will have \$80 million to renovate aging classroom and laboratory space. UT Southwestern trains 25 percent of all medical school residents in Texas.

Paul Quinn College will continue to receive a share of the \$3 million that Texas provide to Teacher Education Centers located at the state's Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

## Health and Human Services

Only public education funding ranks anywhere near the amount of money that Texas spends on Health & Human Services programs. Although Texas is consistently at odds over spending and control with the federal government, \$43.14 billion of the \$77.16 billion the state will spend in this area that is crucial to the welfare of millions of Texans, comes from Washington D.C.

In a budget rider passed last session with little discussion, the Legislature directed the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to achieve \$50 million per year in savings through reductions in rates for acute therapy services. HHSC believes that the state is currently paying up to 200 percent more than the private insurance market pays for the same services. Their proposal is to reduce the rate to 145 percent. In developing its proposal, HHSC used data from a study conducted by Texas A&M. These cuts will affect families with members who receive services from Comprehensive Outpatient Rehabilitation Facilities/Outpatient Rehabilitation Facilities (CORF/ORF), Home Health Agencies (HHA), and Independent Therapists.

Since that time, concerns have been raised over the methodology and applicability of research used to arrive at the targeted savings. Some believe that the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) will block implementation of the rate reductions. In addition, providers have filed a lawsuit seeking to stop the cuts.

I am concerned that these cuts could reduce access to critical services that could impact 60,000 severely disabled children. Because of this, I joined 60 Democrats and six Republicans in asking House Speaker Joe Strauss and Lt. Gov. Patrick, in their roles as joint chairs of the Legislative Budget Board, to provide HHSC with the flexibility to lessen the scope of the reductions. This could involve postponing action until the next legislative session, lowering the threshold of the required savings, or extending the period of time wherein they are to be achieved. At the time of this writing, this matter remains unresolved.

In 2003, 12 separate agencies that operated under the general heading of Health and Human Services were all brought under the umbrella of the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) under HB2292. Periodically, all state agencies regularly undergo a process called Sunset Review. "Sunset" is designed to determine if the need for an agency still exists.

In 2014, the Sunset Advisory Commission recommended that the Department of State Health Services (DSHS), the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), the Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS), the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) and the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) all be consolidated into the single Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) agency. The goal is to increase efficiency and produce cost savings by



Senator West with students from Bishop Dunne High School during their visit to the Capitol.

lowing year, the plan can either proceed, be modified or withdrawn. An unacceptable rating for three years straight will trigger the appointment of a Board of Managers by the Commissioner of Education and could lead to closure among other options.

Concerns regarding the care and treatment of special needs children were the motivation for SB507 that requires a school district to install video cameras in a special education classroom if requested by a parent, trustee or staff member.

School districts may test the flexibility offered by HB 2610 that changes the way an educational instruction year is calculated. Traditionally, a school district meets the requirement if it has delivered 180 days of instruction. Under HB 2610 a day of instruction is counted as 420 minutes and an instructional year is calculated at 75,600 minutes. The bill also stipulates that a public school district's school year cannot end prior to May 14.

School districts should be thrilled with HB1474 which requires that the full, two year appropriation be released to the district during the first year of the biennium.

## Higher Education

Renewed goals for higher education would see more Texans with a degree or certification; more students actually graduating college, as opposed to leaving without a degree; a new focus on students obtaining marketable skills for a 21st Century workplace, and helping students control student loan debt. Of course none of this happens without increased investment from the state. And it comes amid an outcry to slow soaring college costs.

The Legislature took a step in the direction of addressing college costs through its appropriation of \$19.9 billion to its colleges and universities, an increase of \$1.4 billion over FY14-15.

## Financial Aid

An increase of \$62.7 million for the TEXAS Grants program comes on top of the \$145 million increase for the 2014-15 budget cycle. TEXAS Grants is the state's largest financial aid program and with its total appropriation of \$715 million, an estimated 85 percent of newly eligible students may receive grants of up to \$5,000 to help with college costs.

Texas has a shortage of doctors, particularly outside our urban centers. So we added \$38.7 million to Graduate Medical Education grant funding because we hope that students will stay in Texas to open their practices when their residencies are done.

# CAPITOL REPORT

eliminating duplicative administrative functions. The executive commissioner of HHSC is to submit a transition plan by March 1 of 2016.

## Business & Commerce

Many Texas communities, including rural areas and inner-city neighborhoods are underserved by financial institutions. It causes check cashing stores and payday lenders to flock to areas frequented by those who do not have bank accounts. While my attempt to regulate payday lending hit another brick wall, the Legislature approved the idea of attracting more financial institutions to underserved communities.

I sponsored HB1626 by Rep. Eric Johnson that allows cities and counties to designate, with the assistance of the Finance Commission and Credit Union Commission, certain areas as banking development districts; an approach that has been successful in New York. Banks and credit unions who apply to open locations in these districts would be authorized to receive deposits from local and state governmental entities. Stimulating economic growth is a win for the financial institution and the community.

I also sponsored HB2590 by Rep. Johnson that helps prosecutors protect would-be homeowners who have been victimized by fraudulent real estate practices. This form of real estate fraud takes place when dishonest agents produce fraudulent deeds to properties for which they have no legal rights. Unsuspecting buyers make payments or improvements to properties for months, even years without those payments ever reaching the lenders or actual property owners. Property taxes also go unpaid.

HB2590 will allow local, county and state prosecutors to exact financial penalties from unscrupulous realtors on behalf of the victims, of up to three times the amount defrauded and allows the courts to order these activities to stop immediately. Any additional violations could draw fines up to \$10,000 each.



Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick joined Sen. West and others at Prairie View A&M University during a news conference after a meeting requested by Sen. West to gather information following the death of Sandra Bland.

With all the information now available on the internet it's become even more difficult to protect the privacy of individual citizens. That's why I sponsored HB394 by Rep. Jones McClen-don that removes certain identifying and financial information from public documents, such as appraisal records, that are on public websites.

SB1367, a bill I authored, provides additional protections to tenants when landlords claim property damages. Under rental agreements, tenants can be held liable for property damages. When there is a security deposit and the tenant moves, the landlord has 30 days to notify the former tenant by itemizing deductions for damages taken from the deposit. But if there is no security deposit, a landlord is not required to notify the former tenant of damages.

SB1367 requires a landlord to send written notice to a former tenant regarding a property damage claim, providing that the tenant has given the landlord a forwarding address. The bill also amends the way notice of an eviction can be given to a tenant and provides that a tenants' right to a trial in these cases cannot be waived.

## Natural Resources

Much of Texas economic success is owed to oil and gas exploration. But it was the literal explosion in the use of hydraulic fracturing, "i.e. fracking" that helped Texas shake-off the ef-



Senator West visits with business leaders during "Irving Day" at the Capitol.

fects of the recession faster than any other state in the country and years ahead of the national recovery.

While the industry has gone great lengths to separate fracking from being a possible cause of earthquakes, science begs to differ. Scientists say there were few to no earthquakes in North Texas along the Eagle Barnett Shale prior to 2008. There have been more than 50 since. It was a showdown waiting to happen as session began when Denton became the first Texas city to pass an ordinance banning hydraulic fracturing within its boundaries.

Of the 125 members that supported HB40 in the House, 77 signed on as joint or co-authors. The bill passed by a proportionate 26-5 margin in the Senate. HB40 says that a municipality does not have the ability to pass an ordinance that would supercede the mineral rights of a landowner.

## State Affairs

Two bills passed from this committee and into law with overwhelming partisan support. I'd trade them both for a fighting chance at one bill that could not get a hearing.

### Guns and more guns!

I'll admit to my attempt to sink HB910 that will allow persons with a concealed handgun license (CHL) to openly carry a holstered firearm in public places. I supported a floor amendment that would have prevented peace officers from detaining an individual to determine whether they had a handgun license solely because they were visibly carrying a holstered gun. It brought members together who are most often on opposite sides of major issues.

I supported the amendment because I have seen the effects of racial profiling and have expended considerable effort to prevent it. My concern remains that some people are more likely to be detained than others. Law enforcement absolutely hated the amendment. Later, the amendment was stripped from the bill and it passed into law.

The bill, as does existing CHL law, allows private businesses to post a sign which indicates that carrying a firearm into that establishment is prohibited by law.

There was no disguising my disdain for SB11, the Campus Carry bill. Few Texas law enforcement agencies, campus officials or professors are happy to see this legislation become law. Our institutions of higher learning have missions more worthy of their time than fretting whether a student is carrying a weapon in his backpack.

SB11 authorizes a CHL holder to carry a handgun on the campus of a public college or university, but allows private institutions to opt-out of the law. Under the bill, public institutions can establish rules on where handguns can be carried and how they're stored. But they cannot create rules that would effectively ban carrying a concealed handgun on campus. State law requires a CHL holder to be 21 years old. So what do you tell your 18, 19 or 20 year-old, or a tough professor that would make them feel comfortable about campus carry?

It was my third session filing a bill that would allow certain persons who have been exonerated of a wrongful conviction to be eligible for compensation under Texas law. The problem is that current law says a person must have applied for compensation within three years after the law passed or within three years of being exonerated. SB122 would have remedied the problem that made Ms. Joyce Ann Brown ineligible for compensation for the "nine years, five months and 24 days" that she spent in a Texas prison. The 2013 bill passed out of the Senate and a House committee before stalling during the session's final days. This year, it was never heard in a Senate committee.

## Transportation

A chord struck by the 83rd Legislature grew more resounding during the 84th. Texas is moving away from using debt to finance highway construction and is actively working to reduce road-related debt. This session's loudest note was sounded by SJR5. Beginning in 2017, SJR5 would take \$2.5 billion in general sales tax proceeds and deposit it into the State Highway Fund when tax collections exceed \$28 billion that year. The bill will also take part of the motor vehicle sales and rental tax for the same purpose after annual collections surpass \$5 billion beginning in 2019.

The funds cannot be used to build toll roads, but **can** be used to pay down road bond debt. SJR5 requires a constitutional amendment, **Proposition 7** which will be on the ballot to be decided by voters on November 3, 2015. Combined, last year's **Prop 1** and this year's **Prop 7** add about \$4-5 billion in new funding for Texas' roads. It's roughly the amount of the annual funding TxDOT says is needed to keep roads and congestion near the same conditions as were reported in a 2010 study.

In the early 2000s, when the Legislature was either unwilling or unable to invest in roads or could not adhere to its history of pay-as-you go financing, several bond funding packages for financing roads were created. One of them was the Texas Mobility Fund. In 2007, voters approved the issuance of up to \$5 billion in General Obligation Bonds through Proposition 12. The bonds would be paid for by vehicle inspection, driver license and auto title fees. HB122 ended the issuance of new debt under the Texas Mobility Fund, as of January 1, 2015 (*retroactive*). Now, the revenue can be used to retire or refinance Mobility Fund debt.

HB2612 requires TxDOT to identify the amount of debt owed for each state-owned toll road in Texas and to determine which would be conducive to either accelerated or lump-sum payoff. The bill also orders the agency to devise a plan to eliminate the tolls on all TxDOT toll roads.

Coming on the heels of the recession, the Low-Income Vehicle Repair Assistance Program was a huge success for North Texans a few years back. Created by the Legislature in 2007, the program also had a vehicle replacement component. The program's objectives are tied to air quality and emissions standards. Under Air Check Texas, run jointly by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and the North Central Texas Council of Governments, drivers who failed inspection can apply for income-based assistance to make minor car repairs. Under the Drive-A-Clean-Machine Program, drivers could qualify for up to \$3,500 towards the purchase of a replacement vehicle. Unfortunately, vehicle replacement program was cut drastically during the 2011 and 2013 budget cycles.

The good news for 2016-2017 is that both programs, which are paid for by vehicle inspection and maintenance fees, will be fully funded at nearly \$87 million; an increase of \$81 million over the FY14-15 budget. Counties will also receive additional funding to help implement air quality initiatives.

## Criminal Justice

Of the dozen bills I filed two months before session began, none was more urgent for me than the legislation that would establish policy and outfit Texas patrol officers with body-worn cameras. SB158 would finally pass the Legislature with just four days left in the 140 day session. It may be the most comprehensive body camera legislation in the nation to date.

SB158 sets policy on privacy, open records, training, records retention and when a camera should be activated. It allows local flexibility and provides a \$10 million grant program to assist agencies in purchasing body camera equipment. To gain consensus on SB158, we gathered input through a series of meetings with police, sheriffs, cities, counties, prosecutors, defense lawyers and advocates. Our hope is that body cameras, like in-car video, will become standard equipment used by law enforcement to provide factual evidence following encounters between law enforcement and the public.

HB2150 should go a long way in addressing community concerns over a defendant's ability to receive a fair trial. HB2150 replaces Texas' antiquated "key man" grand jury selection process where the judge chooses from familiar faces to pick candidates for a grand jury pool. Under HB2150, the jury panel would be selected from a pool of 20 to 125 candidates and the number of alternates would expand from two to four. Texas is the last state to use the "key man" system.

More criminal justice reform will come from HB3724. In 2013, SB344 passed into law. It allows the introduction of new evidence when new technology has been developed that could help determine the guilt or innocence of a defendant. This session's HB3724 provides the ability for testimony from an expert witness to be reintroduced if the expert's testimony could change because of advances in technology.

In 2003, I authored the first bill that allowed the records of certain criminal offenses to be sealed from public disclosure if the case was dismissed following the successful completion of probation in a case where the defendant received deferred adjudication. SB1902 goes further. It allows the records of persons who were convicted of certain misdemeanor offenses for the first time, to be sealed through an order of nondisclosure.

SB487 expands access to post-conviction DNA testing. A recent ruling by a Criminal Appeals Court limited testing for DNA evidence only to cases where the defendant could prove that the item to be tested contained DNA evidence. SB487 requires the court to order DNA testing if there is a reasonable likelihood that the evidence may contain biological materials.



*Pictured are Gary Griffith - Safer Dallas, Better Dallas, Edna Pemberton - Mrs. Oak Cliff, Gary Tittle Assistant Chief - Dallas Police Dept., Toni Brinker-Pickens - Operation Blue Shield Founder, and Vana Hammond - City of Dallas during Senate Floor recognition of "I'm All In" with Operation Blue Shield.*

I co-authored a bill that clarifies the process for appointing counsel if a defendant is arrested in a county on a warrant that was issued by a different county. Under existing statute, a defendant could remain in jail indefinitely while this is sorted out. SB1517 set time limits for counsel to be appointed for an indigent defendant if counsel has not been appointed by the arresting county after a request has been made by the defendant.

Routinely, some courts charge defendants arrested on multiple charges, or for multiple counts of the same charge with separate court costs for each charge or each count of an offense. I authored SB740 that is consistent with case law which says that only one court fee should be levied for a single court setting. However, we worked on an amendment with municipal courts to allow multiple fines to be collected when there are multiple violations in traffic cases.

Legislation I authored in 2013 helped end school disciplinary practices that resulted in children receiving criminal citations for non-criminal, school code violations, such as disruption of class. Years later, these tickets show up when kids are applying for college or for jobs. A similar ticketing system also landed students and parents in adult court settings while doing little to address truancy.

Three bills passed this session continued the work started in 2013. SB107 gives schools more discretion in addressing school discipline problems that resulted in suspension or removal from the classroom. It requires a school to designate a campus behavior coordinator whose duties include notifying the parent if a child becomes involved in disciplinary proceedings. SB108 allows misdemeanor offenses committed by a child under 17 years to be disposed of in alternate settings and the records of the offenses to be expunged if certain programs are completed. Also under SB108, a child cannot be arrested for a traffic or fine-only offense.

HB2398 establishes a civil process to address truancy and extends the compulsory age of attendance from 18 to under 19 years. The bill also requires truancy prevention measures to be initiated if a child fails to attend school for three days unexcused. Another bill, HB2894 requires training for school police and campus resource officers.

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GROWING OUR OWN LEADERS

As a staunch advocate for the success of our young people, I have continued to work to afford them opportunities for educational and civic growth through programs such as the Dr. Emmett J. Conrad Leadership Program which for 22 years has allowed college students to actively participate in internships that will provide them viable employment experience in their majors. These opportunities expand their employment marketability, career choices and leadership capabilities. Those efforts will be enhanced by SB 1750, which I passed this session, to ensure that eligible institutions offer off-campus, work-study positions, thus preparing Texas' students for the workplace with practical employment experiences in their fields of study. In addition, college students interested in government and politics are welcomed in my Capitol office during session as legislative interns. Knowing the path to student success begins earlier than college, I created the Student Advisory Committee (SAC) for the purposes of obtaining students' perspectives on legislative issues; to foster a volunteer spirit in them, to help cultivate leadership skills and to create networking opportunities with community leaders. SAC is made up of middle and high school students.

Students as young as 6 years old can experience the Texas Legislature firsthand through the "Page for a Day" Program where they see their Texas government at work as well as the lawmaking process. For information on any of these youth-related programs, please contact my office.



2015 Dr. Emmett J. Conrad Leadership Program

Senator Royce West

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