



Capitol Update (1-15-21)

Greetings from your Texas Capitol! For those receiving our Capitol Update for the first time, let me tell you a little bit about it. I have deployed back to Austin for the 87th legislative session. As you know, the Texas Legislature meets every other year (in the odd number year) for 140 days to file bills, debate policies, and enact law on behalf of the people of Texas. To make sure I'm providing topical and pertinent information to you, the citizens I serve, my staff, and I typically compile this newsletter bi-weekly throughout the session, as the tempo of activity may direct. This Capitol Update will cover several items on which I want to update you, as well as some resources and alerts for the session.

Senate Procedures Related to COVID-19

Wednesday, the Senate adopted its rules on Senate procedures relating to COVID-19. These protocols are operational for the first 60 days of the Legislative session. At the conclusion of the 60 day period, the Senate will reevaluate its protocols based on infection numbers and vaccine distribution. These protocols are designed to ensure the Texas Senate can remain open to the public while also protecting the people who visit the Capitol to testify or conduct other official business and those affiliated with the Senate's operation as a body. In addition to keeping everyone safe, we also want to avoid the potential degradation of the Senate's ability to conduct business due to a lack of personnel (be it staff, support personell, or senators themselves) who may become contaminated with this viral infection. The Senate protocols require all visitors entering the Senate gallery or a Senate committee hearing room to have a negative test administered that day. Testing is available at the Capitol's North entrance, and no personal data is collected from persons who are tested to enter the building. Once a negative test is confirmed, a wristband will be issued so that you will be able to enter the Senate chamber, committee hearings, or drop by the Capitol office. While these protocols are for Senate areas of responsibility only (Senate gallery, Senate committee rooms, and Senate offices) within the Capitol, the Texas House sets separate protocols for their areas of responsibility. In addition, the State Preservation Board sets separate protocols for the Capitol Complex as a whole, of which the Senate and House are subsets.

I am strongly encouraging electronic meeting methods at this stage. However, if you wish to have an in-person meeting, I ask that you make an appointment and have a negative test taken the day of the meeting before entering the Capitol office. Again, this is to maintain the ability for my colleagues and me and all of our associates who interact daily to be present for duty so the Senate can do its constitutional duty of passing strong, conservative legislation for Texas citizens.

President Pro Tempore

During the opening day ceremony, I had the honor of being elected to serve as president *pro tempore* during the 87th Legislature. I had the unique privilege of being sworn in by my brother, Justice Wade Birdwell of Arlington, who serves on the 2nd Court of Appeals in Fort Worth. The President *pro tempore* of the Texas Senate is a constitutional office chosen pursuant to Senate rules and is traditionally reserved for a senior Senate member. The *pro tem*, as it's often shortened, is third in the line of succession to the Governor of Texas and presides as Governor in the absence of the Governor and the Lt. Governor.

It was a real honor to be elected by my colleagues to this position, and I want to thank you, my constituents, who, for several elections, have trusted me with sitting in the seat *that you own*. I am deeply grateful for your trust and confidence over the last decade. What a great place Texas is, and I'm honored to serve in such a capacity.



Being sworn in as president pro tempore by my brother with my wife holding the Bible and Lt. Gov. Patrick looking on.



Pictured here with constituents who joined me on opening day (L-R), Judge Greg Wilhelm (Ellis), Former Chief of Staff Ben Stratmann, Ron Sutton (Hood), Me, Ike Thomas (Hood), Bobby Vickery (Navarro), and Stan Parker (Falls). Also invited but not pictured: Janet Jackson (Bosque) and Jon Gimble (McLennan).

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 you. Therefore, I never go into a legislative session without properly assembling and preparing staff to help me serve the citizens of Senate District 22. We have a couple of familiar faces on "Team Birdwell," but we have many new staff members who have replaced fine members of my previous staff who have moved on to other opportunities. Like the last session, Chief of Staff Anna Barnett will lead and integrate all of the Capitol, District, and Committee offices' operations. Our new Legislative Director, HW Dickey, will run all policy operations in my Capitol office. Additionally, our highly-skilled team includes:

- Policy Analyst Tori Villarreal
- Policy Analyst Sam Johnson
- Policy Analyst Cole Nieman
- Office Manager & Scheduler Kirstee Bock
- Constituent Correspondence Manager Carter Byrum
- Bullock Scholar Garrett Taylor (Sophomore, *Baylor University*)
- District Manager Suzy DeArmond (*Granbury Office*)
- District Manager Shelly Verlander (*Waco Office*)

Along with my Capitol Office and District Office staff, I also have a highly qualified committee staff in the Natural Resources and Economic Development Office. That staff includes:

- Committee Director Tucker Royall
- Senior Policy Analyst JW Galloway
- Policy Analyst and Clerk Clint Harned

Key Dates for the 87th 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 12, 2021 (60th day)—Except for "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 the floor on filed legislation without a vote of 4/5 of the House or Senate.
- May 31, 2021 (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 20, 2021—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 30, 2021—This is the 91st day following adjournment, and the date that bills without specific effective dates become law.

Resources for the 87th 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 (<https://capitol.texas.gov/>) is an excellent 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](#). With the recent developments of Facebook and Twitter censoring conservative voices, I moved to Parler. With Parler being taken offline and the uncertainty of whether it will return, which I'm hopeful that it will, I am in the process of determining what other options may be available for social

media. If you know someone who typically gets their information from either of those two platforms, please forward this to your friends so that they can sign up for our updates via email.

I hope you found the information above to be useful. Communicating with constituents is one of my top priorities, so I appreciate you contacting any of my offices to ensure 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 wants 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.

God Bless,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brian Birdwell".

Brian Birdwell
State Senator, District 22

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